ゼロの使い魔2
〈風のアルビオン〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

ゼロの使い魔2

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や-01-03

ゼロの使い魔2 ヤマグチノボル

MEDIA FACTORY

580

9784840111447

ISBN4-8401-1144-8

C0193 ¥580E

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）

メディアファクトリー

ゼロの使い魔2　風のアルビオン

パーティでルイズと近づけた気がした才人だが、ルイズは相変わらず才人を下僕扱い。納得いかない才人は、ルイズとケンカばかりしていた。そんなある日、トリステインの王女アンリエッタが、フーケを捕らえたルイズたちの力を見込んで頼みごとを持ちかけてきた。隣国アルビオンの皇太子から、手紙を返してもらってほしいという。その手紙は決して他人に見られてはならないものらしい。引き受けた才人たちは、護衛のワルド子爵とともに出かけることに。このワルド、なんとルイズの婚約者で、ルイズの満更でもない様子が才人は気に食わない。ワルドに惚れたキュルケやタバサも加わって、旅が始まるが――!?　大人気の使い魔コメディ第2弾♪

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデヴュー。著書に『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』（共に角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『グリングリーン鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。小説連載も多数手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤル等）。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。8月16日生まれ。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔 2

〈風のアルビオン〉

ヤマグチノボル

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青銅のギーシュ
（ギーシュド・グラモン）
十七歳。
やたらとキザぶっている
ルイズの同級生。
使い魔を溺愛している（種類は秘密）。
微熱のキュルケ
（キュルケ・アウクスタ・フレデリカ・
フォン・アンハルツ・ツェルプストー）
十八歳／身長171サント／
B94、W63、H95
★好きな食べ物：極寒期の寒い晩さ
★趣味：ジグソーパズル
★特技：ハーフ
★嫌いなもの：雨とルイズ
雪風のタバサ
（本名??）
十五歳／身長142サント／
B68、W49、H67
★好きな食べ物：はしばみ草のサラダ
★趣味：読書
（放っておくと一日中読んでいる）
★特技：サイコロ振り
★嫌いなもの：微笑
アンリエッタ王女
十七歳／身長158サント／
B84、W59、H85
国民から愛される
トリステインの美姫の王女だが、
最近悩みがつきない様子。
サイト
（平賀才人）
十七歳／身長172センチ
★好きな食べ物：期間限定バーガー（もう食えない）
★趣味：インターネット（もう見れない）
★特技：アクションゲーム（もうできない）
★嫌いなもの：体育の先生（もう会えない）
ワルド子爵
二十歳。
女王陛下の魔法衛士グリフォン隊
隊長を務める、
超エリートで美男子で、
ルイズとは婚約が決めた間柄者同士。
ゼロのルイズ
（ルイズ・フランソワーズ・ル・ブラン・
ド・ラ・ヴァリエール）
十六歳／身長148サント／B76、W53、H78
★好きな食べ物：クックベリーパイ
★趣味：編み物（超下手）
★特技：乗馬
★嫌いなもの：カエルとキュルケ

ゼロの使い魔2
風のアルビオン

ヤマグチノボル

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Chapter One: A Secret Boat

Louise was lying on her bed. She was dreaming that she was back in her homeland, a three day ride away from the Tristain Academy, where she was born.

The young Louise in her dream was running around near the house, eventually hiding in the bushes of the labyrinth-like vegetation to hide from her pursuers.

“Louise, where are you? Come out now!” shouted her mother. In her dream, Louise was being reprimanded due to her poor results in magical studies. She was constantly being compared with her sisters, who had much better results than her.

Louise saw a pair of shoes that appeared below the bushes.

“Miss Louise really is hopeless at magic.”

“I completely agree. Why can’t she be like her two older sisters who are very good with magic?”

Louise, upon hearing those words, felt sad and dejected as she bit her lips. The servants started to look for her in the vegetation. Louise tried her best to escape. She retreated to the place she called the “Secret Garden” – the central lake.

The Secret Garden was the only place where Louise felt at ease. It was tranquil, with no one else around. Flowers bloomed everywhere and birds gathered on the benches near the lake. And in the middle of the lake there was a small island on which a small house made of white marble rested.

Next to the island was a small boat originally used for leisure, but now derelict and forgotten. Her older sisters had grown up, and were busy studying magic. Her father, who had retired from his military duties, now spent his time mingling with the nobles nearby. Her father's only pastime was hunting wild game. Her mother's only interest was to teach her daughters and she could not care less

about anything else.

Therefore, besides Louise, no one ever came to the forgotten lake anymore, much less remembered that small boat. That is why whenever Louise was reprimanded, she would come to this place.

In Louise’s dream, the younger version of her jumped onto the boat and snuggled into a blanket that was prepared earlier.

As she hid inside her blanket, a noble clad in a cloak appeared from the mist-covered island.

The noble was about sixteen years old. In Louise’s dream, she was only six years old, a ten year difference lay between them.

“Have you been crying, Louise?” His face could not be seen as it was covered by a large hat.

But Louise knew exactly who he was: he was the Viscount, the noble who had just inherited the lands around her homeland. Louise felt warm and fuzzy inside; the Viscount was the man of her dreams. They had often frequented banquets together and, furthermore, their fathers had already made an engagement.

“Is that you, Viscount-sama?”

Louise haphazardly covered her face; she did not want the man of her dreams to see her crying. It would be embarrassing.

“I was invited by your father today regarding the engagement.”

Hearing this, Louise was even more embarrassed to the point that she did not even dare lift her head up.

“Really? But that would not be possible, Viscount-sama.”

“Louise, my small and dainty Louise, do you dislike me?” the Viscount said in jest.

Louise gently shook her head and said abashedly, ”No, it’s not that. It's just that I’m still young and unready ...”

The face hidden underneath the hat revealed a smile and extended a hand out to Louise.

“Viscount-sama.”

“Lady, please take hold of my hand. Quickly, the banquet is about to start.”

“But…”

“Have you been scolded again? Don’t worry. I’ll talk to your father.” the Viscount said.

Louise nodded, stood up and reached for the Viscount’s hand. What big hands, aren't those the hands that she had always dreamed of holding?

Just as she was about to grasp the Viscount’s hand, a sudden gust of wind blew the hat from the Viscount’s head.

“Eh?!” Louise looked at his face, perplexed. Because it was a dream, Louise had returned to her sixteen year old self.

“What... What are you doing?”

The person underneath the hat was not the Viscount, but her familiar, Saito.

“Louise, come quickly.”

“It doesn’t matter whether I come or not, why are you here?”

“Don’t be so narrow minded, haven’t you fallen for me already?” replied Saito, who was impudently dressed in the Viscount’s clothes.

One had to wonder where he got that much confidence from.

“Don’t be stupid, I was just muddle-headed that time, you better stop dreaming!”

“Stop making up excuses, my Louise.”

“Who is 'your Louise'?!”

Saito pretended not to hear her at all, and instead, came closer to Louise.

“What are you trying to do, you idiot?!”

Ignoring her complaints, Saito proceeded and lifted Louise, who was in the boat, into his arms.

“Why is it you?” Louise asked in frustration while punching Saito. But Saito did not get angry at all, instead his grin became wider. This made Louise slowly turn red from embarrassment. She did not know the exact reason, but she felt good in Saito’s arms. This made Louise even more anxious.

Saito, lying in his bed, slowly opened his eyes. The twin moons in full circle shone onto the room, lighting it up brightly. Louise, sleeping in her bed, moaned as though she was having a nightmare.

Saito prayed that she would continue to sleep. He quietly got up and slowly approached the sleeping Louise.

“What is it partner? Not Sleeping?” Derflinger asked Saito quite abruptly.

“Shhhh...” Saito turned around and put his index finger onto his lips.

“Don't want me to speak? Why not?”

“Shhhh...” Saito shook his head, once again drew his middle finger across his lips and stared at his partner, Derflinger, with annoyance.

“I won’t forgive you for giving me the cold shoulder. My partner wakes up in the middle of the night without telling me a reason. This makes me angry and depressed!”

After saying this, Derflinger moved and shook his body, like he was really angry. What a difficult sword.

Awakened by the rattling of the sword, Louise turned around and opened her eyes.

Saito’s heart skipped a beat.

Sitting up, Louise started to scold Saito.

“Don’t be so full of yourself! You better do some cleaning up, don't you see the dust gathered everywhere? Don’t tell me that you have done it already, you slow-witted fool. You’re such a dimwit!”

Saito’s body was frozen solid, as though the “Harden” spell had been casted on him.

But after Louise finished scolding Saito, she lay down once more and slept. Apparently, she was just talking in her sleep. Even in her sleep, Louise was ordering Saito about. Saito felt simultaneously relieved and saddened.

Derflinger, who was watching Saito all this time, gave a hapless sigh.

“She’s talking in her dreams, huh? But it doesn’t seem to be music to your ears, Saito.”

Saito stared angrily at Derflinger, who had almost spoiled his plan and quickly walked towards him and said, “You better keep quiet, you idiot!”

“You’re really too much, I shall not forgive you! If my partner wants me to be silent, then I will definitely be silent! But for suddenly waking up in the middle of the night and being so sneaky about it, you’ll definitely suffer retribution even if you tell me your reason now.”

Derflinger’s sense of curiosity was the same as his partner's. It seemed that he wanted to know Saito’s reason for waking up in the middle of the night no matter what it took.

Saito sighed, and then pointed to the sleeping Louise.

“What about the Noble’s daughter?”

“What do you think partner?”

Saito used his hands and made a gesture resembling a heart.

“What does that mean?”

“It represents love.”

“That girl likes you, partner?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

Saito stood up, and danced while not making any noise.

“Ah... you are referring to the ball?”

“You saw Louise’s expression while we were dancing, right?”

“Yeah, I saw it.”

“Her face was so red...” Saito said while in a daze.

“Yeah, it was very red.”

“She seemed to want to hold my hands and not let them go.”

“Are you sure!?”

“Derf, you’re just a piece of metal, so you’ll never understand a girl’s heart. If a girl looks at a boy like that, it means she’s indirectly telling him that she likes him.” Saito said, while knocking on the sword.

“True, I’m but a sword, and I don’t understand interpersonal relationships at all. But since you say so partner, it must probably be true.”

Saito nodded happily and said, “You’re really sensible, Derflinger!”

“Then, my good partner, since you’re sure that she likes you, are you going to ravish her?”

“Yes! I’m sure that she likes me, and I think I'm gonna ravish her!... Err, what does 'ravish' mean?”

“That’s impossible. I’ve been around for a long time and this is the first time I’ve heard of a familiar ravishing its master. You’re incredible!”

“Ah... that feels good. Come, praise me again.”

“My partner, you’re fantastic!”

Saito stood up and buoyantly asked, “Derf, who's the most handsome man in the world?”

“Of course it’s you, partner.”

“Who is the greatest person in this world without magic?”

“Of course it’s you, partner.”

The praises went straight to Saito's head. He felt as if the whole world was cheering for him. One had to wonder if he had a problem with his IQ.

“Louise is really fortunate that I have taken a liking to her. The great and handsome me.”

“If that haughty girl really likes you, then why did she have to scold you even in her dreams?”

Derflinger wanted to continue voicing his opinions, but was stopped by Saito. “Louise is in reality extremely stubborn. She would not bare her heart that easily.”

“Is that so?”

“If I went over and asked her, she would definitely reply: 'What are you saying? You stupid familiar!' “

“Like you said, do you really know her inside out, partner?”

“Of course! Although she’s always denying it, in reality she desperately wants me to ‘conquer’ her. She’s already deeply in love with me, but Louise is a very headstrong girl, she won’t tell me that she likes me directly due to her pride.”

“Partner, you must be a genius to have deduced this.”

“So now, I’m to represent planet Earth and 'ravish' this Bishōjo[1] from Halkeginia. You understand don’t you, Derf? So could you do me a favor and keep your mouth shut?”

Derflinger shook his body, signifying agreement.

“If that’s the case, I will remain silent then.”

Saito thanked Derflinger and once again approached Louise.

Louise was still in deep sleep. No matter from what angle you looked at the sleeping Louise, she still looked as beautiful as ever. Saito took a deep breath; the room was filled with a nice fragrance.

Saito, trembling slowly, lifted Louise’s blanket.

Moonlight shone onto Louise who was wearing a nightgown. Even though Louise was wearing her nightie, one could still feel her smooth and supple skin through it. Although just slightly, her breasts had developed. Also, Louise did not like to wear undergarments when sleeping. Saito knew this extremely well - he was the one who prepared her undergarments every morning.

Saito was so touched that tears nearly came out of his eyes. *From now onwards the petite and cute girl will finally be mine,* he thought to himself. He has been waiting for this moment for a week, ever since the ball.

Rubbing his hands together, Saito approached the sleeping Louise and said,“Itadakimasu… ”[2] saying that, he snuggled under Louise’s blanket.

“Ah, Louise, Louise your skin is really so smooth and supple. Haha… Saito you idiot…”

Saito did not know why he called himself an idiot, but nonetheless he was becoming more and more aroused.

He hugged Louise without thinking twice and kissed her cheek. Louise did not look like she would wake up anytime soon; she was quite a sound sleeper.

“Louise, my dear Louise, your face; you have the cutest face in the world...” Following that, just as Saito was about to lift up Louise’s nightgown, she suddenly awoke. Saito was initially shocked, but he recovered quickly and hugged Louise tightly.

“What... What are you doing?!”

Louise immediately realized what was going on and struggled to break free from Saito’s arms.

“Can’t you just stay still?”

“Why... why... are you hugging me?

“What are you saying? I thought that you liked me!?” Saito stared at Louise in frustration; Louise felt the anger and stopped struggling.

“What?”

Saito placed his hands on Louise’s shoulder and asked, “Aren’t you in love with me?”

“What... what... nonsense are you blabbering?”

“It’s all right Louise, I understand how you feel. I’m the one that understands you the most. Don’t be nervous, just relax.”

Saito slowly moved his lips towards Louise’s; Louise’s face became paler and paler.

Me, in love with you??

Louise’s dream just now flashed before her eyes again. Saito was exactly the same as in her dream, speaking to her in that audacious manner. Thanks to that, the more Louise looked at Saito, the angrier she became. Both the Saito in her dream and the Saito in reality made her mad, really mad. You could say it was pure rage.

Louise was now trembling in anger, but Saito mistook it for shyness, as Louise had had no prior experience.

“Are you still nervous, this is my first time too. Relax while I take off my pants...”

Louise felt Saito holding up her waist...

As swift as a flame salamander catches its prey, Louise shot her right leg upward and struck Saito between the legs.

"Arhhh!"

Saito immediately felt his spine carry the excruciating pain from his groin all the way to his brain. Saito, not able to take the pain, began foaming at the mouth and rolled off of Louise’s bed. Louise slowly got up and grabbed the horse whip which was placed next to her bed.

Saito, seeing the whip, tried to escape, but the whip-bearing Louise already had her foot on Saito’s head.

“What did you want to do to me just now?!”

Saito, slowly recovering from his pain, managed to speak, ”Aren’t we just like lovers whispering sweet nothings to each other just now?”

Louise using her foot to apply more pressure on Saito's head replied, "That's only wishful thinking on your part."

"Does it mean that I'm mistaken…? Aren't you fond of me?"

"Who is fond of whom?"

"Well, don't you like me, Miss Louise?"

"Haha… Please tell me the reason for you believing that, but you'd better make it simple to understand, otherwise I will not be able to tell what will happen to you…"

"Well, during the ball, you looked at me, your familiar, with those lovelorn eyes."

Louise with her face turning red replied, "So that's why you thought that I'm fond of you and climbed into my bed?"

"That's correct, Miss Louise. Is your humble familiar really mistaken?"

"You're definitely mistaken, I have never heard of a familiar climbing into its owner's bed."

"I will take note of it the next time."

Louise gave a sigh and said in a tone that seems to pity Saito, "There won't be a next time."

"Master, Look! Look! The twin moons are shining so beautifully tonight!" Saito said in desperation.

"Anyway, it's too late…" Louise said in a voice trembling in anger. Under the twin moon's moonlight, Saito's cries of pain could be heard many miles away…

The same time that Saito was being badly beaten up, Fouquet was staring idly at the ceiling somewhere far way from the academy in the City of Tristain's

Genoa[3] prison. She was the triangle earth mage, who was apprehended by Saito and Co. two days ago for the theft of the “Staff of Destruction”. As she was infamous for stealing valuable treasure from various nobles she was placed in Genoa prison, the maximum security prison located in the City of Tristain.

She would be charged in court the following week. As she had caused a great deal of shame to nobles all over the country, she would most probably either be exiled or be given the death sentence. Either way, she wouldn't be allowed in Tristain anymore. At first, she thought of escaping, but she later gave up that thought.

Inside her cell, there was nothing except for shoddy looking bed and a table that was made of wood. Even the utensils she used were made of wood. Things would be quite different if there was just something made of metal… Like a spoon.

She had wanted to turn the prison walls and iron bars into soil using alchemy. Without her wand, which was confiscated, that would not be possible. Magicians were helpless without their wands. Furthermore, the prison walls and iron bars were specially enchanted to resist magic. Even with the use of alchemy, she would not be able to escape.

“It’s really mean of them to lock up a feeble female like myself here.” Fouquet grumbled to herself. Then she thought about the youth that had apprehended her, *That boy is quite strong, can’t believe that he’s an ordinary human. Who exactly is he? Then again, it doesn’t concern me anymore.*

“Time to sleep...” Fouquet closed her eyes and laid down. Just as she had closed her eyes, she quickly opened them again.

Fouquet heard someone walking down to the dungeon where she was held. She heard peculiar noises that sounded like a spur. She deduced it could not be a warden, as they did not wear spurs on their boots. Fouquet quickly sat up.

A person wearing a cloak appeared next to her cell, his face unseen as it was covered by a white mask. Judging from the long wand visible beneath his cloak, he was a mage.

In a rather scornful manner, Fouquet exclaimed “I’m surprised to see a visitor in the middle of the night!”

The man in the white mask did not reply, and instead gave Fouquet a cold stare.

Fouquet instinctively knew that this person was hired to kill her. Some nobles she had stolen from must have thought that sentencing her in court was too much of a hassle and had decided to hire an assassin to kill her. Some of the items she had stolen from the imperial family were likely stolen goods to begin with, and in order not to let such a truth surface the imperials had probably decided to silence her.

“Well, as you can see, this doesn’t look like a place to entertain someone. But I think you’re not here just for a cup of tea, right?” Fouquet said.

She began to think, *Though I’m without my wand, I will not easily give up without a fight. I’m not only well versed in magic; I’m pretty good in close combat too. However, I’m powerless to stop him should he use magic. Therefore, I must somehow lure him inside my cell.*

Just then, the man in the cloak spoke, “Are you Fouquet of the Crumbling Earth?”

His voice sounded strong and youthful.

“I’m not sure who gave me this nickname, but yes, I am Fouquet of the Crumbling Earth.”

The man in the cloak raised both of his hands, implying that he did not intend hostility.

“I have something that I would like to tell you.”

“What is that?” Fouquet replied in a rather surprised tone. “Don’t tell me that you’re going to speak on my defense. What a weirdo.”

“I’d be happy to speak in your defense, my dear Mathilda of Saxe-Gotha[4]”

Fouquet’s face became pale. That’s a name I had forgotten, or rather, was forced to forget, she thought. There should be no one in this world that knows that name anymore…

“Who exactly are you?”

The cloaked man did not answer her question and instead asked, “Mathilda, do you wish to serve Albion again?”

Fouquet, who had lost her cool, replied, “That’s impossible! I will never serve those who had murdered my father and annexed my home!”

“Don’t be mistaken, no one is asking you to serve the Albion royal family. They’re going to be overthrown soon.”

“What do you mean?”

“A revolution is taking place. We’re going to overthrow the weak and powerless Imperial family, and succeeding them will be more capable nobles like ourselves.”

“But aren’t you part of Tristain’s nobility? What has Albion’s revolution got to do with you?”

“We are a consortium of nobles without borders who are worried about Halkeginia’s future. We wish to unify Halkeginia and regain the holy land that founder Brimir had once set foot on.“

Fouquet smirked, “Please stop talking nonsense. If that’s the case, why does your consortium of nobles without borders need me? I’m just a prisoner.”

“We need skilled magicians now more than ever. Will you lend us your help, Fouquet of the Crumbing Earth?”

Fouquet waved her hands and replied, ”Please stop dreaming…”

“You wish to unify Halkeginia? The Kingdoms of Tristain, Germania, Albion, Gallia, and a number of smaller kingdoms which are constantly at war with each other? Unifying them would be like a midsummer night's dream.” ↓

“Hmm! Getting the holy land back… how would you fight against the all-powerful elves?”

For hundreds of years, the holy land had been in the possession of the elves living east of Halkeginia. Humans had attempted countless crusades to get back the holy land, but failed miserably each time.

The elves, distinguished by their distinctly pointed ears and unique culture, had long life spans and were highly proficient with magic. As such, they were highly effective warriors. Defeating them would be an uphill battle.

“I have no love for nobles and I have no interest in Halkeginia. As for regaining the Holy land, the elves can stay there for all I care!”

The man in the black cloak took out his wand and replied, “I’ll give you a choice, Fouquet of the Crumbling Earth.”

“Let’s hear it out.”

“Either you become our comrade or…”

Fouquet finished the sentence for him, “Or I would immediately perish here? Am I correct?”

“That is correct. Since you already know our secret, I cannot let you live.”

“You nobles are really a conceited bunch. You’ll never consider other people’s feelings,” Fouquet said with a chuckle, “To put it nicely, you’re inviting me to join you, but in reality there is no other choice, is there?”

The man in the black cloak too replied with a chuckle, “That’s correct.”

“Let me be a part of your consortium then. I hate people who do not know how to give orders.”

“Let’s go then.”

Fouquet placed both her hands onto her chest and asked, “What's the name of your organization?”

“Do you really wish to join us, or are you just toying with me?”

“I just want to know the name of the organization I will work for from now on.”

The man in the black cloak removed a key from his pocket, unlocked Fouquet’s cell and answered, “The Reconquistadors.”

Chapter Two: Her Majesty's Melancholy

Morning.

Louise's classmates stared wide-eyed at her as she entered, mostly because she towed behind her a chained, locked, and badly broken being with her into the classroom. Her face emitted an extremely dangerous aura, and her beautiful brow curved in anger.

She quickly fell into her chair.

"Whoa, Louise. What did you just drag in here?" Montmorency the Fragrance asked Louise, her jaw dropping.

"My familiar."

"Oh right… it does look like that if I look closer." Montmorency nodded. Although huge welts and dried blood plagued the face, one could still definitely recognize that this thing used to be called Saito. His head was locked up with his wrists, and he was dragged in like a sack of trash.

"What did he do?"

"He snuck into my bed."

"OH!" Montmorency exaggeratively showed her shock, fraying her beautiful curvy hair. "Vulgar! Oh, sneaking into that bed is so… Oh! Dirty! Unclean! Very unclean." She bit on her handkerchief, while mumbling about reputation and ancestors and the like.

Ruffling her fiery red hair, Kirche entered the classroom staring at Louise. "It must be your seduction, right, Louise? Dirty, dirty Louise, you seduced Saito like a whore[5], didn't you?"

"Who's dirty here? Isn't that you? No way I'd seduce him!"

“Geez... all injured like that... poor kid... let me heal you.” Kirche hugged Saito’s head. Her huge breasts nearly suffocated him, but he offered no resistance, and rather enjoyed the sudden heaven that came to him.

“Whoa whoa whoa...”

“Are you all right? Where does it hurt? I’ll heal you with a spell.”

“Quit lying. You can’t use water-type healing spells, can you? Your runic name is “Heat”, as in heatstroke. Go and cool down a little.” Louise said indignantly.

“It’s Ardent. AR-DENT. I never thought your memory was Zero too.” Kirche glared at Louise’s chest. “Looks like the name Zero isn’t just about your chest and your magic!”

Louise’s face went red in an instant. Despite that, she laughed coldly, biting her lip. “Why do I have to take this from a woman who can only boast of her breasts? Are you saying that all a woman’s worth is in her breast size? That’s a really messed up way to think. Your brain must be empty or something... all the nutrients went to your b-breasts... your brain must... m-must be e-em-empty...” Although she tried to appear calm, her voice shook. She seemed to have taken a very personal offense.

“Your voice is shaking, Vallière.” And Kirche gently held Saito, his body still full of bruises and injuries, and touched his face with her chest. “Oh, my dear, do you think that big-breasted Kirche is stupid?”

“N...no... y-you’re very intelligent!” Saito appeared in ecstasy, burying his face into Kirche’s chest. Louise’s brow raised at that, and she forcefully pulled in the chain in her hand.

“You come over here!” Saito, locked head, wrists, and entire body, heavily fell on the ground. Louise stepped on his back, and coldly spoke to him. “Who gave you permission to speak in human? You’re supposed to say ‘woof’, dog.”

“Woof. Yes, ma’am.” Saito replied quietly.

“Stupid dog. Do it again. When you say ‘yes’ what do you do?”

“Woof.”

“Exactly. You say ‘woof’ once. Then what do you do with ‘I understand, mistress’?”

“Woof woof!”

“Riiiiight. You say ‘woof’ twice. What about ‘I wanna go to the bathroom’?”

“Woof woof woof!”

“Eeeeexactly. You say ‘woof’ three times. That’s pretty good vocabulary even for a stupid dog, so you don’t have to say anything else, got it?”

“.....woof.”

“A 'woof'ing dear is cute too!” Kirche said as she caressed Saito’s chin. “Awww... you can come to my bed tonight. How’s that? I can let 'woof woof' lick a lot of places you’d like!”

Saito suddenly sprang up on his knees, wagging his tail, which is a broom that Louise tied on his behind last night. There were even ears made of rags on his head.

“Woof! Woof! Woof woof!”

Louise silently and forcefully pulled the chain tight. “You little...” And she angrily stepped on him.

“Didn’t I say ‘woof’ the way you told me to?!” Saito had enough, stood up with a ‘*I better give you a lesson*’ face, and dove towards Louise. All she had to do, though, was pull the chains on his foot, and he fell with a heavy thud.

“You are absolutely no different from a dog at its passionate phases. Not only did you wag your tail at a Zerbst woman, you even attacked your own mistress. Despicable. Very, very, very, very unbecoming.” Louise retrieved her whip from her bag, and began to vigorously beat Saito with it.

“Ouch! Stop! Stop! S-T-O-P!” His body locked up, Saito could only roll around on the floor.

“Ouch? Isn’t it ‘woof’? It’s ‘Woof’! Don’t all dogs say ‘woof’?”

Sounds of whipping reverberated throughout the lecture hall. Louise’s hair flew around as she chased Saito, who was trying to crawl away, and continuously whipped him. Saito made whimpering ‘woof’s whenever a hit connected. Nobody would have thought that this Saito was the legendary familiar.

The students in the classroom watched this embarrassing scene, wondering: *Did this commoner really beat Guiche the Bronze? Did he really catch Fouquet of the Crumbling Dirt?*

CRACK! CRACK!

The students silently watched her beat Saito. She only noticed just now, with her full attention at beating Saito, that everybody was looking at her, and her face grew red. She hastily put away her whip and held her wrists. “Di...disciplining ends here!”

We know it’s disciplining, but geez...horrified by the scene, the students turned away.

“Aren’t you the one with the heat, Vallière?” Kirche said in boredom.

Louise viciously glared at her. Saito, under continuous injuries and pain, fainted, and simply laid lifeless on the ground. The teacher’s door opened, and Professor Kaita appeared.

The students sat in their seats. Professor Kaita was the one who scolded Professor Chevreuse, who fell asleep on guard duty during the Fouquet incident, and was told by Osman 'You’re pretty easy to anger'. Sporting long, jet black hair, and a pitch black cape, his every move gave an unfriendly, uncomfortable feel. Although he was quite young, his unfriendly manner and cold look earned him ill repute from the students.

“Let's start the class. As everyone knows, my runic name is ‘gust’. Kaita the Gust.” He was enveloped with shocked stares, and satisfied by that, he continued. “Do you know what the most powerful element is, Zerbst?”

“Isn’t that the ‘Void’ element?”

“I’m not asking for something of legends. I want something realistic.”

Kirche then confidently answered, “Then it has to be the fire element, Professor Kaita,” along with her irresistible smile.

“Oh? Why do you think that?”

“Heat and passion can burn anything and everything, isn’t that so?”

“I’m afraid that is not so.” Kaita said as he pulled out his wand from his waist. “Let's give that a try. Attack me with your best fire elemental attack.”

Kirche stood still in surprise. *What is this teacher doing?*

“What is it? I recall that you work best with fire elemental spells, am I right?” Kaita challenged.

“It won’t be a simple scald.” Kirche winked.

“No problem. Give me your best shot. Don’t tell me the flaming red hair of the Zerbst family is there just for looks?”

Kirche’s usual brisk smile disappeared. She retrieved her wand from her cleavage, her fiery, crimson long hair stood on their ends and crackled as if flames were erupting from them. She waved her wand, and from her extended right hand appeared a small fireball. As Kirche chanted her spell, the fireball expanded, resulting in a huge flaming sphere of a meter in diameter. The students ducked under their desks in panic. Her wrist turned and spiraled towards her chest, and released the fireball.

Kaita made no attempt to dodge the giant sphere of fire heading towards him. He raised his wand, and made sweeping waves as if swinging a sword. A raging gale suddenly began, and instantly scattered the huge fireball. It even knocked down Kirche, who was standing on the far other side of the room. “Everyone, I now tell you why the wind element is the strongest. It is quite easy. Wind can sweep up everything. Fire, water, and dirt alike cannot find footing when faced against strong enough winds.” Kaita briskly announced. “Unfortunately, reality does not let me experiment this, but even Void would probably not stand. That is the wind element.”

Kirche stood, displeased, and locked her arms. Kaita paid her no attention, and continued. “The unseen wind shall be the shield that protects everyone, and if needed, the lance that scatters enemies. And one more reason that wind is the most powerful is...” He raised his wand, “YOBIKISUTA DERU WIND...” as he chanted his spell.

However, at this very moment, the door to the classroom opened, and a nervous

Colbert entered. He was dressed strangely, a huge, golden wig over his head. In close examination, his suit had the most intricate borders and decorations. *Why is he dressed like that?* Everyone thought.

“Professor Colbert?” Kaita raised a brow.

“Ahhh! I’m sorry, please excuse the intrusion, Professor Kaita.”

“Class is in session.” Kaita tersely replied, staring at Colbert.

“Today’s classes are henceforth canceled.” Colbert sternly announced. Cheers emanated from the classroom. To stop them, Colbert waved with both arms, and continued. “I have something to tell everyone.” Colbert exaggeratively tilted his head back, causing his wig to slide off to the ground. The tense mood Kaita built suddenly collapsed, as laughter enveloped the classroom.

Tabitha, who sat in front, pointed at his balded head and suddenly said, “Shiny.”

The laughter grew more intense. Kirche laughed while rapping Tabitha’s shoulder, “You can really talk when you speak up once in a while!”

Colbert blushed, and loudly yelled. “SILENCE! Only commoners laugh out loud! Nobles only covertly snicker with their heads down even if they find something funny! Otherwise, the royal court will question our school’s educational results!” The classroom finally quieted to those words.

“All right. Everyone, today is the most important day for Tristain Magical Academy. This is our great Founder Brimir’s birthday, a very celebratory day.” Colbert’s face straightened, and he placed his arms behind his back.

“It is highly probable that His Majesty’s daughter, the beautiful flower that we Tristainians can proudly boast to the rest of Halkeginia, Princess Henrietta, will, to our great fortune, pass by the Academy on her way back from visiting Germania.”

Whispers and chatter filled the room.

“Therefore, we must not allow any slack. As this is very sudden news, we have begun preparations to receive her to the best of our abilities. Due to this, today’s classes are hereby cancelled. All students, please put on your formal wear, and

assemble at the main entrance.” The students anxiously nodded in unison. Colbert severely nodded in return, and loudly announced, “This is an excellent opportunity to let Her Majesty the Princess know that everyone has matured as model nobles. Everyone must prepare to their best to let Her Majesty witness this fact! Dismissed!”

* * *

Four golden-helmeted stallions led a carriage quietly on the road to the Magic Academy. The carriage was exquisitely adorned with gold, silver, and platinum sculptures. Those sculptures were the Royal Seals. On one of those, a unicorn crossed with a crystal staff signaled that the carriage belonged to Her Majesty the Princess.

One could find, upon closer examination, that the stallions drawing the carriage were not normal horses. They were unicorns like the one on the Royal Seal. Unicorns, which, by legend, would only allow the purest girls ride them, were the best for leading the Princess’s carriage.

The carriage’s windows had ivy borders and coverings, as if to disallow anyone the outside from looking in. Behind the Princess’s carriage was Cardinal Mazarin, who held all Tristain political authority with an iron grip since His Majesty passed away. His carriage’s splendor was not less than Her Majesty the Queen’s. In fact, his was even more embellished. The difference of these two carriages on the road clearly showed who currently had the most authority in Tristain.

Around the two carriages was the Imperial Guard, a division of mage guards. Composed of the most prominent noble families, the Magic Imperial Guard was the pride of all nobles in the country. Every noble male dreamed of wearing the black cape of the Magic Imperial Guard, and every noble female dreamed of being their brides. This Imperial Guard was Tristain’s symbol of prosperity.

The road was paved with flowers as commoners cheered from the roadside. Every time the carriages passed them, one could hear “Long live Tristain! Long live Princess Henrietta!” and sometimes even “Long live Cardinal Mazarin!” though that paled in comparison to the Princess. He was not well-regarded as he

was rumored to be of commoner blood. Some said it was jealousy toward his position. As the carriage's curtains opened, and as the crowds saw the young Princess, the cheers got ever more passionate. She also returned a genial smile to the people.

* * *

Henrietta closed the curtains, and deeply sighed, losing the rose-like smile that she just sent to the crowds. All that was left was distress and deep melancholy unbecoming of her age. The Princess was 17 that year. With a slim figure, light blue eyes, high nose, she was an eye catching beauty. Her slender fingers played with her crystal staff. As of Royal blood, she was, of course, a mage.

Neither the cheers along the road nor the flowers flying in the air could cheer her up. She seemed to be holding deep political and romantic anxieties.

Sitting beside her, Mazarin watched her while playing with his beard. Wearing a hat like that of a priest and a grey formal suit, he was a slim and frail man of forty-some years old. His hair and beard had already grown white, and even his fingers looked like skin on bones, creating an appearance far too old for his age. Ever since His Majesty died, his iron grip on both foreign relations and internal politics had considerably aged him.

He just left his carriage and entered the Princess's.

He wanted to talk about politics, but the Princess only sighed, and paid no attention.

"That is your thirteenth time today, Your Majesty." Mazarin noted, annoyed and concerned.

"Hmm? What?"

"That sighing. Those of royalty shouldn't do that all the time in front of their subordinates."

"Royalty?! What?" Henrietta was shocked. "Aren't you the King of Tristain?

Doesn’t Your Highness know about his rumors on the streets?”

“I am not aware.” Mazarin replied indifferently. He was lying. He knew about everything in Tristain, and even Halkeginia, down to the amount of scales on the fire dragons living in the volcanoes. He knew all about it. He just pretended that he didn’t.

“Then let me tell you. Tristain’s Royal family has beauty, but not its scepter. Cardinal, you’re the one holding the scepter. Bird’s bones wearing a gray hat...”

Mazarin blinked. The words ‘bird’s bones’ coming out of the Princess stung. “Please don’t speak of commoners’ rumors so carelessly...”

“Why not? They’re just rumors. I’ll marry the King of Germania as you told me to.”

“We can’t help that. An alliance with Germania is extremely important to Tristain.” said Mazarin.

“That I know.”

“Your Majesty understands the rebellion being carried out in that ‘White Country’ Albion under those idiots? Those people can’t seem to tolerate the existence of royalty in Halkeginia.” He frowned.

“Impolite, unrefined imbeciles! They’re trying to hang that poor prince! Even if the entire world can forgive their actions, Founder Brimir shall not forgive them. I wouldn’t forgive them.”

“Indeed. However, Albion’s nobility has unsurpassed power. The Albionian Royal Family might not even survive tomorrow. One of Founder Brimir’s three bestowed royalties is going to fall, just like that. Meh... countries that cannot solve their own internal strifes have no right to exist.”

“The Albionian Royal Family is nothing like Germania’s. They’re all my relatives. You have no right to say that even as Cardinal.”

“I humbly apologize. I will ask for forgiveness from Founder Brimir before I go to bed tonight. However, what I just said is the truth, Your Majesty.”

Henrietta only sadly shook her head. Even that gesture radiated her beauty.

“Word is that those stupid Albionian nobles have the gall to declare how they’re going to unite all of Halkeginia as one. It certainly seems like those people would set their sights at Tristain after extinguishing their royalty. If it really turns out like that, it would be too late if we don’t take steps to prepare right now.” Mazarin severely explained to Henrietta. She looked out the window, pretending to pay no attention. “Reading the opponent’s actions and countering it at the first available opportunity is true politics, Your Majesty. If we can create an alliance with Germania, then we can create a covenant to counter Albion’s new government, and ensure this little country’s survival.”

Henrietta continued to sigh. Mazarin opened the curtain and looked outside, and saw the shadow of his pride. A young, breathtakingly sharp-looking noble, sporting a feather-hat and long beard, marched with the convoy outside. A medal of a griffin fastened his black cape, and one look on his mount showed why. It had an eagle’s head, wings, and talons, and it had a lion’s body and hind legs. A griffin.

This man was the leader of one of three Mage Guard divisions, the Griffin Knights, Captain Lord Wardes. His division was the most memorable amongst the entire Mage Guard, and especially to Mazarin. Wielding formidable magical prowess, the Mage Guard was organized through extremely selective trials amongst nobles, and each member rode a magical beast to his division’s name. They were the Tristainian symbols of fear and pride.

“You summoned me, Your Highness?” Wardes’s eyes twinkled, and approached the carriage window on his griffin. The window slowly opened. Mazarin looked out.

“Wardes-kun, Her Majesty is feeling depressed. Can you get something for us that can cheer her up?”

“Understood.” Wardes nodded, and observed the road with the gaze of an eagle. He quickly found a small section of the street, and had his griffin head there. Pulling out his long staff from his waist, he chanted a short spell, and briskly waved it. A small gust erupted from the ground, collecting all the petals strewn on the ground into Wardes’ hands. He returned to the carriage with the bouquet, and presented it to Mazarin. Mazarin stroked his beard, and suggested, “May

Captain please present this to Her Majesty yourself?”

“That would truly be a great honor.” Wardes saluted, and turned to the other side of the carriage. The window slowly opened, Henrietta extended a hand to receive it, and showed her left hand to him. Wardes emotionally held her left hand, and lightly kissed it.

Still quite upset, Henrietta asked, “What is your name?”

“Your Majesty’s Mage Guard, Griffin Knights leader, Lord Wardes.” He gratefully lowered his head and replied.

“A model of nobility. How very fine of you.”

“I am merely a lowly servant for Your Majesty.”

“There have been fewer nobles who would say this lately. When Grandfather was still alive, oh my... under the great Philippe III’s reign, the whole nobility shared that kind of marvelous chivalry.”

“Sad times nowadays, Your Majesty.”

“May I expect your sincerity when I get in such upsetting times again?”

“When that happens, no matter where I am, in battle or in the skies, no matter what I must leave behind, I will run over to serve Your Majesty.”

Henrietta nodded. Wardes saluted once again, and left the carriage’s side.

“Is that noble quite capable?” she asked Mazarin.

“Lord Wardes. His runic name is ‘Lightning.’ Even the ‘White Country’ can only boast of few people who can prove to be a match against him.”

“Wardes... I think I’ve heard of that place before.”

“I think that is close to Lord Vallière’s territory.”

“Vallière?” Henrietta’s memory came to being, and she nodded. That name was now in their destination, the Magic Academy.

“Cardinal, do you remember the name of the noble that caught Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Aren’t you about to knight them soon?” Henrietta was shocked.

Mazarin was uninterested. “I think it’s high time for knighting rules to change. One needs to serve in the military to deserve that. How can the title of a knight be so easily given away for arresting a thief? Either way, it seems we will be fighting Albion with Germania soon, and it would not be a good idea to lose our nobles’ loyalty due to jealousy.”

“You made a lot of decisions without me knowing.”

Mazarin did not reply. Continuing to mumble, Henrietta remembered that the name Vallière was among the nobles who caught Fouquet. *It will all work out*, Henrietta thought, and calmed down.

Mazarin looked at the Princess. “Your Majesty, it seems that there is some... instability between the Royal Court and part of the nobility.”

Henrietta shook.

“Something about intervening in the Princess’s marriage, and destroying our alliance with Germania.”

Cold sweat dripped from Henrietta’s forehead.

“You have not been exposed to them, have you, Your Majesty?”

After a length of silence, Henrietta replied annoyingly, “...No.”

“I’ll take Your Majesty’s word for it then.”

“I am the Princess. I do not lie.” Henrietta breathed a sigh of relief.

“...your fourteenth time, Your Majesty.”

“Just something in my mind. All I can do is sigh now.”

“As royalty, your country’s stability comes before your feelings.”

“I’m like that all the time.” Henrietta replied apathetically. She looked at the flowers in her hands, and said dejectedly, “...are flowers on the road not a blessing, Cardinal?”

“All I know is a flower picked to a person’s hands is the flower’s blessing.”

* * *

As the Princess went through the Academy gates, rows of students raised their staffs in unison, silent and serious. After the main gates were the doors to the central tower. Osman stood at attention there to receive the Princess. As the carriages stopped, servants rushed to lay down red carpet to its door. Guards tensely announced her arrival.

“Her Royal Highness of the Kingdom of Tristain, Princess Henrietta has arrived.”

The first out the door, however, was Cardinal Mazarin.

The students grunted, but Mazarin paid no attention, standing at the side of the carriage, holding the Princess’s hand as she alighted. The students finally applauded. A youthful, flowery smile emerged from the Princess’s face as she elegantly waved.

“That’s the Princess of Tristain? Heh... I’m better looking than that.” Kirche mumbled. “Oh my dear, who do you think is prettier?” She turned to Saito, locked tight and lying flat on the ground.

“Woof.”

“I can’t understand you if you just woof! Who is it?”

Saito looked towards Louise, who was attentively looking at the Princess. If only she could stay quiet like that, she is a very pure, moving, and quite beautiful. No matter how mad she gets, how cold she treats him, and even if he is treated like a dog, this soft look and such a stunning appearance can put Saito in a trance.

Louise suddenly blushed, which Saito saw. What is this about? He turned towards whatever she was facing. A hat-wearing, rather cool-looking noble, riding on a magical beast with an eagle’s head and a lion’s body. Louise was watching him enthralled.

Saito found it weird. *That noble seems like a nice guy, but that’s no reason to*

look at him so deeply and even blush like that. Am I being jealous? He thought. *No, that can't be. I don't have that kind of relationship with Louise.* He rebutted himself.

No matter, Saito thought. *I still have Kirche.* A brunette with a well-endowed cleavage. A passionate beauty. *If it turns out like that, I might as well go for perfect Kirche.* He thought rather excitedly. But Kirche was blushing and watching that noble as well. Saito lowered his head, suddenly feeling the heaviness of all the chains on him, weighing him to the ground. Tabitha simply read her book as if the Princess's arrival meant nothing to her.

"And you just stay like that." He said to Tabitha. She raised her head and looked at what Louise and Kirche saw, looked at Saito again, and simply mumbled, "Just three days."

* * *

That night...

Saito laid in his straw bed, watching Louise. It seemed like she couldn't calm down. She would stand up one moment, and sit down the next, worrying about something while hugging her pillow. She had been like that ever since she had seen that noble that day. After that, she had said nothing, returning to her room like a ghost, and since then she had been sitting on her bed just like that.

"You're... acting weird." Saito started, but Louise made no answer.

He stood up, and waved in front of her eyes. She didn't move.

"A bit too weird." He then pulled on her hair. Louise's hair was very delicate, very soft, as if even pulling them slightly would break them off, that kind of soft. He put in some force to the pull, and she still made no reaction. Same for when he pulled on her face.

"Time to change to your pajamas." He grandly saluted to Louise, and reached for her blouse, slowly unbuttoning it. Now she had only her underwear left. Still, she did not move, as if in a spell. Boring... what's wrong with her? Geez... Saito

coughed.

“Louise-sama. From my world there’s this art called ‘breast-expanding massage’.”

He made that up, of course. Saito blushed.

“You rub it like this, and then it’ll slowly get bigger. You can say it’s a kind of magic.” Saito extended his hands, reached around as if to hug her, and started rubbing her back. “What’s this? Where are they? Why aren’t they there? Oh... this is the back.” And then he shook his head on purpose. “Geez... I got it wrong. They’re both flat, that’s why.”

Louise still didn’t move, not even to this rather disgusting act from Saito.

“I... what am I...IDIOT! WHAT DID I JUST DO?!” After realizing that, he forcefully shook his head, and beat it with his own hands on the bed. He was visibly embarrassed that he actually did that. And then he was depressed. He knew that as a person, being scolded and yelled at was sometimes glory. But if it only hurt if someone said something, then he wasn’t worth being noticed.

Just as he was thrashing about, somebody knocked on the door.

“Who could it be?” Saito asked Louise.

The knocks were very orderly. It started with two long knocks, and then three short ones...

Louise suddenly woke up from her trance. She put on her clothes, stood up, and opened the door.

Standing there was a girl, covered entirely in a black veil.

She looked around, and then walked in, closing the door behind her.

“...you are?” A shocked Louise barely managed to voice.

The veiled girl made a ‘shh’ gesture with a finger on her mouth, and took out a staff from her black cape, lightly waving it while chanting a short spell. Glowing powder filled the room.

“A silencing spell?” Louise asked. The veiled girl nodded.

“There might be extra ears and eyes around.”

After making sure the room had no magical ears and no peeping holes, she slowly removed her veil.

In front of them was really Princess Henrietta. Saito held his breath. Louise was already very cute, but this Princess could match her in cuteness, and still have this admirable elegance.

Louise frantically went down on her knees. Saito didn’t know what to do, and just stood there, with no idea what was going on.

Henrietta coolly, and gently spoke. “It has been a while, Vallière.”

Chapter Three: A Childhood Friend's Request

Princess Henrietta, who had just appeared in Louise's room, looked like she had been overcome with emotion, and hugged the kneeling girl.

"Oh, Louise, Louise, my dear Louise!"

"This won't do, Your Highness. Coming to a humble place like this....."

Louise said ceremoniously.

"Oh! Louise! Louise Françoise! Please stop acting so formally! You and I are friends! We are friends, are we not?"

"I am not worthy of such kind words. Your Highness."

Louise replied with a steely, strained voice. Saito, stupefied, just stared as the pair of beautiful girls embraced.

"Stop that, please! Neither the Cardinal, my Mother, or those greedy court aristocrats who buzz around wearing friendly faces are here! Oh, don't I have any friends who will open up to me? If even Louise Françoise, my old friend whom I've missed dearly, acts so distant, I would just die!"

"Your Highness....."

Louise lifted her face.

"When we were little children, didn't we get together and chase butterflies at the palace courtyard? And got all muddy?"

With a shy face, Louise answered.

".....Yes, and La Porte-sama the chamberlain told us off for getting our clothes so dirty."

"Yes! That's right, Louise! We were arguing over those puffy cream cakes, and ended up having a real scuffle! Oh, whenever we fought, it was me who always lost. You would grab my hair, and I'd just start crying."

"Not at all, Princess achieved victory on at least one occasion."

Louise said, looking sentimental.

"You remembered! Looking at the two of us, one could call that battle the Siege of Amiens!"

"That was when we were fighting over a dress in Princess' bedroom, wasn't it?"

"Yes, in the middle of our 'Make-Believe Royal Court', we ended up fighting over who would play princess! And it was my blow to your stomach, Louise Françoise, that successfully decided it."

"I fainted in the presence of Princess."

After that, the two of them exchanged glances and broke out in laughter. Saito, amazed, just kept watching them in that state. The princess may have looked like a lady, but she was actually a tomboy.

"That's more like it. Louise. Ah, I'm getting so nostalgic, tears are coming out."

"So how do you guys know each other?"

Saito asked, as Louise closed her eyes in reminiscence before answering.

"I had the pleasure of serving as Princess' playmate back when we were children."

After that, Louise turned back to Henrietta.

"But, I am deeply moved that Princess would remember such things..... I thought you'd already forgotten about me."

The princess gave a deep sigh and sat down on the bed.

"How could I forget? During those times, every day was fun. There was nothing at all to worry about."

There was a profound sadness in her voice.

"Princess?"

Louise looked worried as she peered into Henrietta's face.

"How I envy you. Freedom is such a wonderful thing, Louise Françoise."

"What are you saying? You're the royal princess, are you not?"

"A princess born in her kingdom is like a bird being raised in a cage. You go here and there on your master's every whim....."

Henrietta said, looking lonely as she gazed at the moon outside the window. She then held Louise's hands and gave a sweet smile before speaking.

"I... I'm getting married."

"......You have my congratulations."

Louise, who somehow felt the sadness in that tone, spoke in a subdued voice.

It was at that moment that Henrietta noticed Saito, who had been sitting on his bundle of straw.

"Oh, forgive me. Was I intruding?"

"Intruding? How would that be?"

"Well, isn't he your lover? Oh no! It seems I was so caught up reminiscing that I didn't realize my blunder!"

"Huh? Lover? That creature?"

"Stop calling me that."

Saito said with a disappointed voice.

"Princess! That's just my familiar! Don't even joke about it being my lover!"

Louise shook her head wildly, denying Henrietta's words.

"Familiar?"

Henrietta looked at Saito with a blank expression on her face.

"But he looks like a human....."

"I am a human, Princess."

Saito gave a strained greeting to Henrietta.

And he was even more hurt by how hard Louise had denied they were lovers. Even though that really was the case, it hurt all the same.

He recalled Louise's profile as she gazed at the other young noble during the day.

At any rate..... I'm a familiar. An earthling. Not a noble.

And I want to go home. I want to eat a teriyaki burger. Yeah, and I might even receive an answer at the online dating service. Painful thoughts like these were swirling together into a chain.

Feeling a great weight upon him, he put his hand on the wall. As fast as Saito had become elated, his feelings fell just as soon. What a hectic personality.

"True, true. Oh, Louise Françoise, you may have changed since our younger days, but you are still quite the same."

"I didn't make it my familiar because I wanted to."

Louise looked disappointed. Henrietta gave off another sigh.

"Princess, what happened?"

"No, it's nothing. Forgive me, oh, I'm so ashamed of myself. It's not something I should tell you..... but I am just so....."

"Please tell me. What troubles are they that cause Princess, as cheerful as she is, to sigh like this?"

".....No, I cannot tell you. Please forget I said anything. Louise."

"I will not! Didn't we use to talk about everything? Princess was the one who had called me a friend. Won't you share your worries with your friend?"

After Louise spoke, Henrietta gave off a cheerful-looking smile.

"You've called me a friend, Louise Françoise. That makes me so happy."

Henrietta nodded her head in determination, and began to talk.

"You must not speak to anyone about what I am about to tell you now."

After that, she gave a quick glance in Saito's direction.

"Should I step outside?"

Henrietta shook her head.

"A mage and her familiar are as one. I see no reason for you to leave."

And with a sad tone, Henrietta started talking.

"I am to marry the Emperor of Germania....."

"Germania, you say?!"

Louise, who hated Germania, spoke out in astonishment.

"That country of barbaric upstarts?!"

"Yes. But it can't be helped. It must be done to solidify our alliance."

Henrietta explained the political climate of Halkeginia to Louise.

There was an insurrection among the nobles of Albion, and it looked like the Royal Family would soon be overthrown. If the rebels won, then the next thing would be the invasion of Tristain. To defend against this, Tristain was looking to form an alliance with Germania. For the alliance's sake, it was decided that Princess Henrietta would be married into the Germanian Imperial Family.....

"So that's why....."

Louise said with a depressed voice. It was clear from Henrietta's tone that she did not desire this wedding.

"It is alright. Louise, I have long since abandoned the notion of marrying the one whom I love."

"Princess....."

"Those two-faced Albion nobles do not want Tristain and Germania to become allies. Two arrows are easier to break when they are not tied together."

Henrietta murmured.

".....Therefore, they have been searching frantically for anything that would interfere with the marriage.

"And they've found something....."

Saito didn't know anything about the alliance or Albion, but in any case, it seemed like it was something serious. *Yup, as big as another Yagoto*, Saito thought with a nod.

"Then this is about that thing that could get in the way of Princess' wedding?"

Louise asked, her face looking pale, and Henrietta gave a regretful nod.

"Oh, Founder Brimir... please save this unfortunate princess....."

Henrietta covered her face with her hands, and crumbled on the floor. Saito was a little shocked at the dramatic gesture. He'd never seen anything so grandiose in his life.

"Tell me, please! Princess! Just what is it that could interfere with the princess' wedding?"

Louise, like she had also been infected, rattled off with an agitated look. With both hands still on her face, Henrietta looked like she was in pain as she began muttering.

".....It is a letter that I had written some time ago."

"A letter?"

"Yes. If those Albion nobles get their hands on it..... they would probably send it forward to the Germanian Imperial Family as soon as they could."

"What kind of letter could that be?"

".....That I cannot tell you. But if the Germanian Imperial Family were to read it..... they would never forgive me. The marriage would fall through, and with it, the alliance with Tristain. Then Tristain would stand alone against the strength of Albion."

Louise gave a gasp and seized Henrietta's hands.

"Where would that letter be? The letter that would bring crisis to Tristain!"

Henrietta shook her head.

"It is not with us. The truth of the matter is, it is already in Albion."

"Albion! But then...! Is it already in the enemy's hands?"

"No..... the one who holds the letter is not with the rebels of Albion. As the conflict between the rebels and his kinsmen unfolded, Prince Wales of the Royal Family....."

"The Prince Wales? The Prince Valiant?"

Henrietta bent back and laid down on the bed.

"Oh, it's a disaster! Sooner or later, Prince Wales will fall captive to the rebels!! And when that happens, the letter will come to light! And everything would be ruined! Ruined! Without an alliance, Tristain would have to take on Albion by itself!"

Louise held her breath.

"Then, Princess, the favor that you're asking of me....."

"Impossible! It's impossible, Louise! How could I be so terrible? It's all confusing! When I think about it, I couldn't ask you to do such a dangerous thing

as to go to Albion while this conflict between the nobles and the royalists is unfolding!"

"What are you saying? Be it the kettles of hell, or into the jaws of a dragon, if it's for Princess' sake, I'll go anywhere! There is no way the third daughter of the House of la Vallière, Louise Françoise, could overlook such a crisis for Princess and Tristain!"

Louise kneeled down and lowered her head reverently.

"Please leave this matter to me, the one who has captured Fouquet the Crumbling Earth."

Saito, who had been leaning on his arm against the wall, turned to look at Louise and spoke.

"Hey, wasn't that me?"

"You're my familiar."

"Woof."

"A familiar's achievement, is its master's achievement."

Louise said with perfect confidence.

"And a familiar's mistake?"

"That would be your mistake, wouldn't it?"

Though he felt somewhat cheated, it was useless to object when Louise got into her usual threatening attitude, so Saito just nodded half-heartedly.

"So you will help me? Louise Françoise! You are a dear friend!"

"Of course! Princess!"

Louise grasped Henrietta's hands, and as the former spoke heatedly, the latter gave in and started crying.

"Princess! I, Louise, forever friend of the princess, will be your confidante! Have

you forgotten my vow of eternal loyalty?"

"Ah, the loyalty. This loyalty and sincere friendship! I'm deeply moved. I will never forget through life your loyalty and friendship! Louise Françoise!"

Saito opened his mouth gaping, and stared half amazed at the two. It was like a conversation between two people who were getting drunk with their own words. *Ah, so this is how it's like for nobles and princesses, it's troublesome*, Saito was strangely convinced as he watched.

"Louise. Sorry to bother you while you're reaffirming your friendship and everything."

"What?"

"Going to Albion in the middle of a war is fine, but what use am I gonna be?"

"I've bought you a sword. You can use that, at least."

"Yeah. I'll do my best....."

Saito lowered his head gloomily. Come to think of it, they haven't talked about the Legendary Familiar Gandálfr's rune that had appeared on the back of his left hand yet. *But even if I say it, it's just going to be a waste,* Saito thought.

Legendary or not, she still treats me like a dog.

"Then shall we go to Albion, find the Crown Prince of Wales, and get the letter back, Princess?"

"Yes, that is correct. I feel confident that you, the ones who have caught Fouquet the Crumbling Earth, should be able to accomplish this difficult mission."

"As you wish. How urgent is this task?"

"I've heard that the nobles of Albion have managed to drive the royalists into a corner of the country. It will just be a matter of time before they are defeated."

Louise's face looked serious as she bowed to Henrietta.

"Then tomorrow, we shall depart."

Afterwards, Henrietta turned her gaze towards Saito. Saito's heart skipped a beat. Though Louise was also foolishly lovely and neat, Princess Henrietta was so beautiful that he almost gasped. Her millet-colored hair, trimmed right above her eyebrows, was swimming gracefully. Her blue eyes shone brilliantly like the southern seas.

White skin, on which floated a feeling of purity, a nose like a priceless and finely shaped sculpture.....

Saito stared at Henrietta as if he was in a trance. Louise looked at this with a chilly gaze. It didn't seem like she was in a good mood.

Why are you looking at me like that, Louise? Ah, is it because I'm staring at the princess with admiration? Could you possibly be getting jealous? But weren't you blushing when you saw that noble with the feathered hat? And weren't you completely out of it after that?

It's funny how jealous you're getting, Louise. Saito shook his head.

Rather than your lover, aren't I just your familiar?

Will I never be more than a dog for you?

I'm just your dog, so why are you looking at me like that, Louise? Ah, is it because I am a dog? Is it because someone like me, who's just at the level of a dog, is looking at her? My apologies. Please forgive me for ever being born. Woof.

Saito's head spun for a mere two seconds.

Louise looked away from Saito with a "Hmph". Saito turned away as well.

Henrietta didn't notice the subtle exchange between Saito and Louise, and she began speaking in a cheerful voice.

"Dependable familiar-san."

"Yes? You mean me?"

After Henrietta called him dependable, the slumping Saito became happier.

"Naw, that's too much. Just treat me like a dog."

"Please keep taking care of my most precious friend."

And then she gently held out her hand. A handshake? he thought, but the back of her hand was turned upwards. What sort of gesture was this?

Louise spoke up with an astonished voice.

"That won't do! Princess! To offer your hand to a familiar!"

"It is alright. This person will be acting for my sake, and without a reward, I won't have his loyalty."

"Ah....."

"Offering a hand? The way someone does to a dog? Is that how you treat your dogs?"

Saito stooped and lowered his head.

"That's not it. Ooh, this is why you're a dog....., a commoner dog who doesn't know anything. When she offers her hand, it means you can kiss her. That's saying it plainly."

"That's...how aggressive....."

Saito's mouth opened widely. He'd never thought that he'd be allowed to kiss a princess from another world.

Henrietta smiled sweetly at Saito. His smile appeared business-like to other people, but Saito was thinking *I'd love to*. To be liked by such a princess wouldn't be half bad, he thought.

Saito grinned deliberately at Louise. Louise muttered under her breath and turned her face away.

*Ah, what, so you *are* getting jealous. Just look at yourself. This is what you get for getting charmed by that noble with the plumed hat and for blushing*, Saito thought.

Saito caught Henrietta's hand, and then firmly pulled her to him.

"Eh?"

Henrietta absentmindedly opened her mouth in surprise. Then before they could blink, Saito pushed his lips against Henrietta's.

"Mmph....."

What tender, tiny lips they were. Henrietta's eyes opened widely into circles.

The circles went white. The strength left Henrietta's body, and, slipping through Saito's hands, she fell to the bed.

"She fainted? Wh-why's that?"

"What are you doing to her highness?! You d-d-d-dog!"

"Woof?"

When Saito turned around, the bottom of Louise's shoe was flying towards him.

Saito took Louise's jump kick in the face and tumbled to the floor.

"What was that for?!"

When Saito said that, Louise stamped angrily on his face.

"It was on her hand she gave you permission, the back of her hand! A kiss on the back of the hand! Why'd you give her an all-out kiss on the lips?!"

Louise was so mad, it looked like she was going to catch fire.

"How should I know! I don't know anything about your rules here."

As his face was getting trampled, Saito spread his hands and spoke plainly. Getting stepped on was something Saito had experience with.

"Y-y-y-you, you, you dog....."

Louise's voice began trembling in fury.

Henrietta rose from the bed while shaking her head. Louise rushed to kneel beside her. She then grabbed Saito's head and pushed it down to the bed.

"I-I'm sorry! My familiar's misconduct, is my own misconduct! And you say it, too! Apologize!"

The ever-prideful Louise was apologizing to someone. On top of that, she was shaking all over. *If I don't do what she says, she'll probably give me hell for it later.*

"Sorry. I only did it since you told me I could kiss you."

"And where can you find someone who would go for the lips when they hear that?!"

"Right here."

Louise struck Saito with her fist.

"How forgetful. Who gave you permission to use human language? Just bark. Dog. Come on, bark, I say. Everyone look at the doggie. Stupid dog."

Then she stamped on Saito's head and ground it against the floor.

"I-it's alright. Loyalty must be rewarded, after all."

Henrietta bowed her head, giving real effort to appear calm.

At that time, the door slammed open and someone came flying in.

"You! The princess! What do you think you're doing?!"

It was the one who had dueled with Saito before, Guiche de Gramont.

With an ever-present imitation rose in his hand.

"What do you want?"

Saito said from where he lay on the floor as Louise continued stepping on his face.

"Guiche! You! Were you eavesdropping? Did you hear our conversation just now?!"

Guiche, however, didn't answer the pair's questions and just stood in a daze.

"For my hunt of the rose-like, lovely princess bringing me to this place..... and then seeing a theft, so to speak, occur through the door's keyhole..... that idiot commoner taking a kiss....."

Guiche flourished his imitation rose and cried.

"Duel with me! You scoundrel!"

Saito sprang up and drove his fist into Guiche's face.

"Agah!"

"Duel away then, stupid! I still remember how you broke my arm! Let's go!"

Saito gave Guiche, who had fallen to the floor, a hard kick, then he sat on him and started wringing his neck.

"Th-that's not fair! You! Gah!"

"So, what now? This guy overheard Princess' story. Shall we have him hanged?"

If the opponent was a guy, Saito could be very serious.

"That might be best..... it's really too bad he had to hear our conversation just now....."

Guiche caught Saito off-guard, and stood up.

"Your Highness! By all means, please appoint me, Guiche de Gramont, to this difficult mission."

"Oh? You?"

"You go to sleep."

Saito swept Guiche's legs. Guiche fell down gaudily.

"Let me join your group!"

Guiche yelped as he collapsed.

"Why?"

Guiche's face reddened.

"I wish to be of use to Her Highness....."

Saito was sensing something from Guiche's appearance right then.

"You, are you in love? With the princess?!"

"Don't say such rude things. I am, absolutely, just wanting to be of use to Her Highness."

However, Guiche's face was burning intensely as he said this. Telling by the passionate look he was giving Henrietta, he was certainly under her charm.

"But you have a girlfriend. Who was that again? Uh, Monmon-something....."

"It's Montmorency."

"So what's going on?"

But Guiche was silent. *Ah, I see*, Saito thought.

"Did you get dumped? She completely dumped you, I bet?"

"Q-quiet! It was all your fault!"

It was the matter of the perfume in the dining hall. When he was caught two-timing, Guiche was dripping with wine from the top of his head courtesy of Montmorency.

"Gramont? Ah, of General Gramont?"

Henrietta fixed her eyes on Guiche's vacantly looking face.

"I am his son, Your Highness."

Guiche stood up and gave a reverent bow.

"Are you also saying that you wish to help me?"

"It would be an unexpected blessing for me if I were to become a part of that mission."

Henrietta smiled at Guiche's enthusiastic expression.

"Thank you. Your father is a great, brave noble, and it seems you have inherited his blood. Then, please. Would you help this unfortunate princess, Sir Guiche?"

"Her Highness has called my name! Her Highness! Tristain's lovely flower, has smiled her rosy smile at me!"

Guiche, having felt too much excitement, fell on his back in a faint.

"Is he alright?"

Saito poked at Guiche. Louise paid no mind to the disturbance and spoke in a serious voice.

"Well then, tomorrow morning, we shall depart for Albion."

"We have heard that Prince Wales has set up camp somewhere around Newcastle in Albion."

"Understood. I've travelled through Albion with my sisters before, so I'm familiar with the geography."

"It will be a perilous journey. If the nobles of Albion discover your mission, they will do everything in their power to get in your way."

Henrietta sat at the desk and, with Louise's feather quill and some parchment, wrote a letter out.

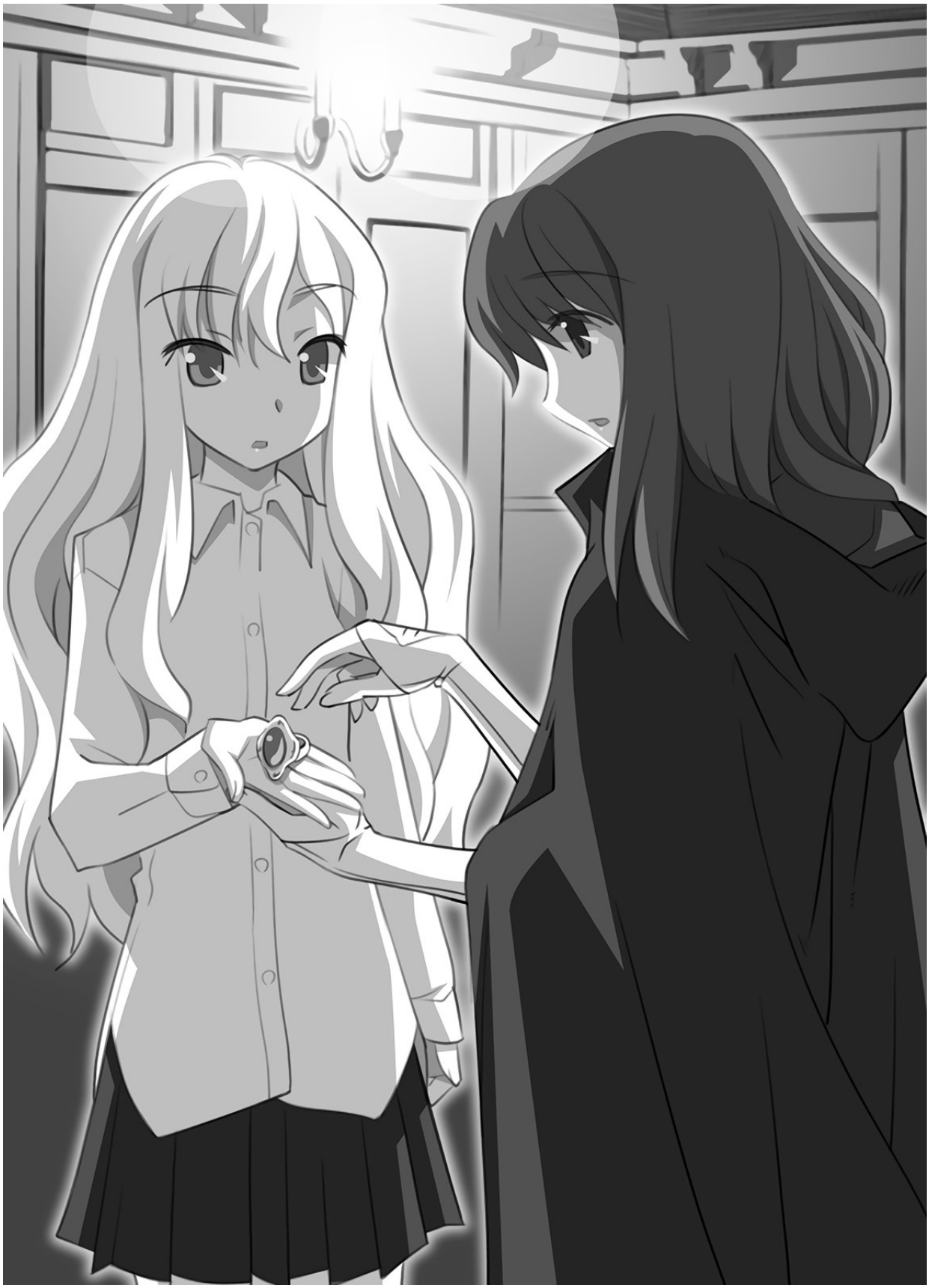
Henrietta quietly gazed at the letter she had written herself, before she began shaking her head sadly.

"Princess? What's the matter?"

Louise, thinking something was up, called out.

"I-it's nothing."

Henrietta blushed, gave a nod as if she had settled on something, then added another line at the end. After that, she murmured in a soft voice.



"Founder Brimir..... Please forgive this selfish princess. Even though my country is in distress, I cannot help but write this one sentence..... I cannot lie about my own feelings....."

Henrietta's facial expression made it seem like she had written a love-letter rather than a secret message. Louise couldn't say anything more, and just looked at Henrietta quietly.

Henrietta rolled up the letter she had written. She waved her staff. Out of nowhere, sealing wax appeared on the rolled-up letter, and a seal pressed down on it. Then she handed the letter over to Louise.

"When you meet the Crown Prince Wales, please pass this letter to him. He should then return the letter in question immediately."

After that, Henrietta removed a ring from the ring finger on her right hand, and gave it to Louise.

"This is a Water Ruby that I had received from my mother. It should work as a good-luck charm, at least. If you have any money concerns, please sell this to get some travel funds."

Louise bowed her head in silence.

"This mission is for the future of Tristain. For that, my mother's ring will protect you from the harsh winds blowing in Albion."

Chapter Four: Port City La Rochelle

Although dawn had just broken, Saito, Guiche and Louise had already started preparing the saddles for their horses. Slung over Saito's back was Derflinger. Because of its length, it could not be attached to the waist.

Louise was dressed in her academy uniform, the only difference was that she now wore horse riding boots instead of shoes. Judging from that, it looked like a great deal of time would be spent riding the horse.

How far would Albion be from here? I'm still not used to riding a horse... Most probably my waist will ache from the riding... he thought to himself.

Just before setting off, Guiche spoke rather awkwardly.

"I have a request..."

"What is it that you want?" Saito responded with hostility while putting his belongings onto the saddle. He still could not forgive Guiche for hurting him that badly during their fight some time back.

"I wish to bring my familiar along."

"Do you have a familiar in the first place?"

"Of course I do. All magicians have one."

Louise and Saito looked at each other, then looked at Guiche again.

"Where's your familiar now?"

"Here." Guiche replied while pointing to the ground.

"But there's nothing on the ground," Louise said.

Guiche responded by tapping his feet on the ground. Just then, a giant brown creature popped out of the ground.

"Verdandi! Oh, my cute Verdandi!"

Saito, dumbfounded, asked, "What in the world is that creature?"

"What do you mean creature? This is my cute little familiar Verdandi."

"You mean that your familiar is that big thing over there?"

Upon closer inspection, that giant brown creature was actually a mole with a size equivalent to a small bear.

"Yes. Ahh... My Verdandi, you look so cute from any angle I look. Have you eaten your meal of earthworms before you arrived here?"

The gigantic mole hemmed happily in response.

"Really? That's wonderful!" Guiche said while rubbing cheek to cheek with his familiar.

"Actually... I don't think that you could bring it along with us..." Saito said in disgust.

“That's right Guiche. That creature moves underground right?”

“That's right. Even though it's slightly bigger that usual, Verdandi is still a mole all right.”

“How are we going to bring it along? We're all riding on horses.” Louise said in perturbed fashion.

“That's all right. Verdandi moves along quickly underground. Am I right, Verdandi?

The gigantic mole nodded in agreement.

“But we're going to Albion! We can't bring creatures that move underground!.” Louise explained.

Guiche, upon hearing that, knelt onto the ground and replied, “I cannot bear the separation with my dear Verdandi... Oh! The pain...”

At the same time, the giant mole seemed to pick up some scent from its nose and drew nearer and nearer to Louise.

“What is this stupid mole trying to do!?”

“Like master, like familiar. They both share the same interest – girls.” Saito said.

“Stop! Stop this right now!”

The giant mole knocked Louise off her feet and started sniffing all over her.

“Ah!!! Watch where you're sniffing! Stop it!”

Louise being constantly poked by the giant mole's nose, started to roll all over the ground. All that rolling disheveled her clothes and exposed her underwear. Louise was starting to get very annoyed...

Saito unconsciously started to be immersed in watching Verdandi and Louise just as if he was admiring a beautiful picture...

“Ah... How beautiful is the scene of a giant mole teasing a damsel.”

“I totally agree.”

Both Saito and Guiche nodded in unison.

“Stop blabbering nonsense over there, you oafs! Come over and help me quickly! Ahh!!!

The giant mole saw the ring at Louise's right hand and started pecking it with its nose.

“You insolent mole! Don't use your nose to sniff at the ring the highness has bestowed to me!.”

“I see now. It's the ring. Verdandi loves jewels.”

“Such an irritating pest!”

“Please don't call Verdandi an irritating pest. It's because of me that Verdandi searches for precious stones and jewels. For an Earth magician, there's nothing more helpful than this.”

Just as Louise was preparing to blow her top, a sudden gust of wind came out of nowhere and blew away Verdandi.

“Who is that!?” Guiche shouted agitatedly.

A rather stout looking noble wearing a feathered cap appeared out of the faint daylight behind him. Saito looked rather surprised.

“That...That person is...”

“What have you done to my Verdandi!?”

Guiche hastily took out his rose shaped wand but the noble wearing the feathered cap was faster. Before Guiche could cast any spell, his wand was already out of his hand.

“I'm not your enemy. I'm under the orders of the highness to accompany you on your journey. The princess is worried about just having you few going to Albion, but then again sending a whole troop of soldiers with you will be too conspicuous. Therefore, I was appointed to accompany you all on this journey.” The noble said while taking off his feather cap and bowing.

“I'm the captain of the Griffin Knights[6], Viscount Wardes.”

The grumbling Guiche quickly shut his mouth. For most of the nobles, Guiche included, being able to join the Griffin Knights meant great prestige.

Wardes looked at Guiche and spoke apologetically. “Sorry for what I did to your familiar. I couldn't stand watching my fiancée being harassed.”

“What!?”

Saito was shocked.

“Fiancée?”

“This majestic looking noble is Louise' fiancée???”

“Wardes-sama...” Louise spoke in a trembling voice after standing up.

“It's been such a long time. My Louise, my dear Louise.”

My Louise??? What kind of joke is that? Saito thought to himself.

Wardes approached Louise and with a beaming smile on his face, carried Louise up.

“It's really been such a long time.” Louise said with her face turning red with embarrassment.

“Still as light as ever. Just like a feather.”

“Viscount... please don't be like this... There are people over here...”

Wardes, who placed Louise back down and replaced his hat said, “Care to introduce your companions to me?”

“Erm... That is Guiche de Gramont and my familiar, Saito.” said Louise while pointing at them while she was introducing them to Wardes. Guiche who did not dare look at Wardes directly, lowered his head. Saito followed suit though a bit unwillingly.

Wardes said with a rather surprised look on his face, “Are you Louise' familiar? This is the first time I've seen a human being a familiar.”

“Thank you for taking such good care of my fiancée.”

"You're welcome."

Saito took the opportunity to size up Wardes. He was indeed handsome. Even though Guiche could also be considered a bishonen[7] himself, he was always making a fool out of himself and making irrational decisions. He could even rub his own cheek with a giant mole.

However for Wardes, not only he had the looks. His eyes were like that of an eagle – keen and sharp. That mustache he had further enhanced his suaveness.

In addition he had a muscular and well built body. Saito had originally thought that all male magicians would have a body like Guiche, but he was proven wrong. Even in hand to hand combat with Wardes without the use of magic, Saito could be subdued in seconds.

Thinking about all that, Saito gave a deep and long sigh. Wardes seeing that, approached Saito and gave a pat on his shoulders.

“What's wrong? Are you having doubts about this trip? There's nothing to be afraid of! Aren't you the one who caught Fouquet of the Crumbling Earth? With your courage alone, nothing is impossible.”

Wardes who had finished saying that, gave a broad smile. With that, Saito felt a tinge of remorsefulness.

Is he really that good of a person? I don't think that I can compare with him in any aspect. That's right. I think Louise would be married to him soon... Just thinking of that has made me alone and empty...

Louise, not able to calm down due to Wardes' appearance, was feeling restless with anxiety. Saito had to turn his head away, he did not want to see Louise that way.

Wardes gave a whistle, and a griffin appeared out from the morning clouds. It was a mythical beast with the head of a eagle and a body of a lion. And on its back were wings that were made up of beautiful white feathers.

Wardes had climbed to the back of the griffin with grace, and then extended a hand to Louise.

“Come over, my Louise.”

Louise lowered her head in hesitation and bashfulness, just like a girl who is in love. This made Saito even more jealous.

What does he think he's doing? “Come over, my Louise?” Your Louise!? Your Louise!? What an obnoxious freak!

Saito being a male, had to keep those thoughts to himself and went up to the horse in silence in the end.

Louise, who was still hesitating, was suddenly carried up the griffin by Wardes.

With one hand on the reins and his wand in the other, Wardes shouted, “Well everybody, onwards!”

The griffin moved forward. Following behind it were Guiche, looking full of admiration for Wardes; and Saito, feeling very down and dejected.

Saito thought to himself while staring at the blank sky.

How far would it be to Albion?

From the headmaster's office window, Henrietta was watching Saito and group departing for Albion. Closing her eyes, she starting praying...

“Founder Brimir, please grant them protection throughout their journey...”

Next to her was Headmaster Osman trimming his nasal hair.

“You aren't going to see them off, headmaster Osman?”

“No, as you can see, I'm busy trimming my nasal hair, your highness.”

Henrietta shook her head in disapproval.

Just then, someone knocked at the door.

“Enter,” said the headmaster.

Mr. Colbert entered room with an anxious look on his face.

“Bad news! Headmaster!”

“You say that quite often. What seems to be the problem now?”

“From the news that I've heard from the castle guards, Fouquet has escaped!”

“Hmm...” said Osman while stroking his beard.

“According to the guard who was on duty that time, some noble knocked him out using wind magic. The person used the opportunity that most of the manpower was diverted to protect the princess to help Fouquet escape! This means that someone inside is a spy! Isn't that bad news?”

Henrietta's face turned pale upon hearing the news.

Headmaster Osman made a gesture to Mr. Colbert asking him to leave.

“Okay. Okay. We'll hear further details from you later.”

After Mr. Colbert left, Henrietta placed her hands on the table and sighed deeply.

“We have a spy in our midst. This must be the doings of the Albion nobility!”

“Maybe it is... OUCH!” said the headmaster while trimming his nasal hair. Henrietta looked at him helplessly.

“How can you still be so relaxed? The future of Tristain is at stake!”

“The opponent has already made his move. All we can do now is to wait, isn't it?”

“Even so...”

“It's all right. If it's him, he'll be able to cope with any problems they'll face during their journey.”

“The person you're speaking of is Guiche? Or Viscount Wardes?”

The headmaster shook his head.

“Don't tell me that person is Louise's familiar. How could that be possible?! Isn't he just a commoner?”

“Your highness, have you heard of the story of Founder Brimir before?”

“I have read most of the story...”

The headmaster smiled and replied, “Then, do you know about Gandálfr?”

“Isn't that Founder Brimir's strongest familiar? Don't tell me...”

At this point of time, Headmaster Osman felt that he had already divulged too much. Regarding the secret of “Gandálfr” he always wanted to keep that to himself. Although he trusted Henrietta, he did not want the Royal family to know about it yet.

“Yes, he's as strong and capable as Gandálfr and furthermore, he comes from another world different from ours.”

“Another world?”

“That's right. He comes from a world different from Halkeginia. Or I should say, from a place not on Halkeginia. I have always believed that this youth from another world will succeed. That's also the reason that I'm so carefree even during these perilous times.”

“Another world different from Halkeginia really exists...”

Henrietta gazed far away. The sensation of the youth's lip still lingered on Henrietta's lips. Touching her lips with her fingertips, she closed her eyes, smiled and said,

“Let me pray then, for the breeze that comes from another world.”

It would take two days to reach Port City La Rochelle by horse from Tristain. The port city was situated on a deep and narrow gorge and because of this, it had a small population of three hundred. As La Rochelle was the gateway to Albion, the number of travelers was ten times more than the local population.

Boulders could be seen on both sides of the narrow mountain pathway. People had carved holes in the boulders, turning them into taverns and shops. Although the buildings looked ordinary, upon closer inspection one could realize that all of them were carved out of a single rock, a feat done by Square ranked earth

mages.

On the narrow street, it appeared to be dark even though it was afternoon due to the gorges blocking the sunlight. If one made a turn on the street, they could see an even narrower street leading to a bar.

On the signboard resembling a keg of wine, the shop's name was written – “Golden Wine Barrel Bar”. However, nothing in the shop resembled its name; the shop was dilapidated like an abandoned house. Piles of ruined chairs could be seen piling next to the door.

Most of the patrons were gangsters and mercenaries. When drunk, they would often fight over the smallest of things like staring incidents or minor squabbles.

Whenever they'd fight, they would fight with their weapons. Therefore, it was common to see people dead or seriously injured inside the bar. The shopkeeper, not wanting to see any more injuries and deaths, put up a notice inside the shop.

“Please use the chairs when you fight in here.”

From the notice, the customers could feel the shopkeeper's helplessness. So they started to use the chairs instead of their weapons when fighting each other. Even though there were still injuries, no one was killed anymore. From then on, chairs that were destroyed during fights got piled next to the door.

Today, the “Golden Wine Barrel Bar” was filled with patrons as usual. Almost all the patrons were mercenaries returning from Albion which was in an internal strife.

“The king of Albion is finished!”

“Don't that means that they're going to start a republic soon?”

“If so, let us offer a toast to the republic!”

The people offering toasts to themselves were formerly mercenaries hired by the royalist to fight along side with them. However, faced with the imminent defeat of their clients, they all decided to retreat back here. This was not considered to be a dishonorable act. As mercenaries, they valued their lives more than their beliefs, and so they felt that they were not obliged to fight to their death for their

clients.

As they were drinking, the bar's door opened and a rather tall lady entered the bar. The hood the lady wore covered most of her face except for the lower part. However, from just the lower part of her face one could already be sure about her beauty. As it was rare for such an attractive lady to come to such a place alone, all eyes on the bar were already on her.

The lady, unfazed by all the eyes staring at her, ordered some wine and food and sat on a table in a corner of the bar. After the food was served, she promptly paid up.

“That... That's a lot of money. Is it really all right?”

“That includes lodging. Do you have any empty rooms?”

An elegant voice replied. The shopkeeper nodded his head and left her table. Several of the male patrons looked at each other and approached her table.

“Excuse me miss, it's dangerous for you to be here alone.”

“That's right! There are lots of dangerous characters around. Don't worry though, we'll be here to protect you.”

With a vile smile on his face, one of them lifted up the lady's hood. Whistles and catcalls could be heard once the hood was removed. The lady was quite a beauty, with her beautiful eyes and elegant nose.

This beautiful lady was none other than Fouquet of the crumbling earth.

“She's really top notch! Look at her skin! It's as white as ivory!”

Another patron attempted to lift up her chin with his arm, but his hand was pushed away by Fouquet. Fouquet gave a faint smile. Another male patron immediately stood up, took out his dagger and placed it on Fouquet's face.

“Aren't chairs supposed to be used instead of weapons at this joint?”

“This is only to frighten you. Chairs can't intimidate anybody right? Don't act so innocent anymore, aren't you here to look for company? We'll keep you

company then.”

Even with the dagger pointed on her face, Fouquet showed no fear. With a slight movement, she reached for a wand.

In an instant, she chanted her incantations. With that, the dagger that the man held turned into earth and settled onto the table.

“She's.. she's a noble!”

The men immediately backed away from her. As Fouquet was not wearing a cloak[8], none of them knew that she was a magician.

“Even though I'm a magician, I'm not a noble,” Fouquet said nonchalantly.

“Most of you are mercenaries right?”

The male patrons looked at each other. If she was not a noble, their lives would not be endangered. If they had done that to a noble, they would be killed without any qualms.

“Yes... And you are...?” a veteran of the group replied.

“It doesn't matter. In short, I'm here to hire all of you.”

“All of us?”

The mercenaries looked at Fouquet with a puzzled look on their face.

“What's with the expression? Is it really that weird for me to employ mercenaries?”

“No. That's not what I meant. You have gold, don't you?”

Fouquet placed a bag full of gold onto the table. After inspecting the contents of the bag, the veteran said, "Wow... Isn't this écu gold?”

The bar's door opened again. This time, a man wearing a white mask had entered the bar. He was the same man who had helped Fouquet escape from prison.

“Well, aren't you early.”

Fouquet seeing that man, gave a low “Hmm” as a reply. The mercenaries, seeing that man's peculiar dress, were all quite surprised. “They have started on their journey,” the masked man said.

“I have done what you had told me to and hired all these men.”

The man in the white mask gave a once over at the mercenaries that Fouquet had hired.

“All of you were formerly employed by the Albion royalists. Am I right?”

“That was until last month,” one of the mercenaries replied with glee.

“But the soon to be defeated royalists aren't our employers anymore.”

The mercenaries laughed in unison. The man in the white mask laughed as well.

“I'll fulfill all your monetary desires. However, I'm not like the soon to be defeated royalists, if anyone dares to run away from battle, I'll kill him myself.”

Since departing from the magical academy, Wardes' griffin had been endlessly moving towards their destination. Even though the rest of the group had already changed their mount twice, Wardes' griffin, just like its master, appeared to be tireless.

“Hold on, isn't the pace too fast for us?” Louise, who was on Wardes' griffin, asked. Over the duration of the journey, Louise spoke in a more informal manner to Wardes than when they were reunited. But that was also partly due to the Viscount's request.

“Guiche and Saito are already on the brink of exhaustion.”

Wardes turned back and looked at Guiche and Saito. Just like Louise had said, both of them were holding their reins tightly in fear of falling off. From the looks of it, both of them would collapse from exhaustion before the horses would.

“But I had originally planned to journey to port city La Rochelle without stopping...”

“That would be difficult, it would take two days to reach by horse.”

“If that's the case, why don't we just leave them behind?”

“We can't do that!”

“Why?”

“Aren't we in this together? Furthermore, a magician should not abandon her familiar...”

“You seem protective of them both. Which one is your sweetheart?”

Louise's face immediately turned red and replied, “What... What sweetheart!?”

“That sets my heart at ease. If my fiancée tells me that she already has a sweetheart, I would die of a broken heart,” replied Wardes with a smile.

“But that was only something that our parents had agreed on.”

“Then, do you dislike me, my small and dainty Louise?”

“Please, I'm not young anymore,” Louise replied, pouting.

“But in my eyes, you're forever that small and dainty Louise.”

Louise remembered that dream that she'd had a few days back, where she was back in the courtyard of her home, la Vallière.

The secret boat on the forgotten lake...

Whenever she was throwing a tantrum there, Wardes would always be there to pacify her.

The marriage that was decided by her parents.

The betrothal that was decided since youth. The one that she would be married to. Her fiancée.

At that time, she still did not fully understand what was going on. She only knew that, so long as she was with the man she had admired, she would be happy.

But now, she finally understood everything. She would be married to Wardes.

“I don't dislike you,” Louise replied with a tinge of embarrassment.

“That's wonderful, in other words, you like me?”

Wardes gently hugged Louise's shoulders.

“I have never forgotten about you even after all this time. Do you still remember? After my father's death during the lancer campaign?”

Louise nodded her head.

Wardes began to reminisce and narrated to Louise about the past.

“My mother had passed away earlier, I inherited my father's estate and title. Wanting to make a name for myself, I went to the capital. Fortunately, the highness had a deep impression of my father who had perished in the battlefield, I was incorporated into the Griffin Knights. I had entered the Griffin Knights as a trainee, training was tough then.

“From then on, you seldom went back to your estate again,” replied Louise while closing her eyes. She too seemed to be immersed in her memories.

“My house and estate were cared for by my butler, Galgann, while I put all my effort serving the nation. After so long, I finally made a name for myself, accomplishing what I had decided upon leaving my homeland.”

“What was it that you decided upon?”

“To ask your hand for marriage once I have made a name for myself.”

“You're kidding right, Viscount? You're so popular among the girls, you have no need to honor your promise to such an insignificant me.”

About Wardes' betrothal. Louise had cleanly forgotten it until she had that dream a few days back. The bridal pact to Wardes was all but a fleeting dream. In her

opinion, it was only an agreement made on a whim.

After Wardes had left his estate ten years ago, Louise had never seen him again. Wardes had already become part of her distant memory. Distant memories had suddenly become reality.

“This journey is a good chance for us to regain those feelings we had when you were young,” Wardes said with a gentle and calm tone.

Louise thought to herself, do I really love Wardes?

Even though she did not dislike him and she did admire him when she was young, that was all in the past.

Suddenly faced with a fiancée and probably marriage, she did not know what to do. Furthermore, they had been apart for so many years, she did not really know whether she still had any feelings for him.

Louise turned her head and looked behind.

She saw Saito prostrating on the horse, it looked like he had nearly reached his limit. Louise pouted her lips. Good for nothing! As soon as she thought of that, she became anxious and her heart pounded furiously.

“We have already been on these horses for nearly a whole day, doesn't he get tired? Are those griffin knights monsters?” Guiche, who was also lifelessly slouching on the horse, asked.

“Who knows?” Saito replied lethargically. He felt embittered each time Wardes touched Louise. He touched her again...this time hugging her by the shoulder... *What is that guy up to... Even though you're Louise's fiancée, even though I have no right to stop you, you should have at least done it somewhere else where I could not see...*

Each time Saito thought of that, he became more tired and his heart became heavier.

Guiche, looking at Saito in such a state, began teasing him. “Heh heh... Don't tell me you're jealous?” Guiche said with a snicker.

“Ah! What are you implying?”

“I guessed it correctly, didn't I?” Guiche laughed even harder.

“Shut your mouth, mole boy!”

“Mwahaha... You actually carried a love for your master that would never flower? To tell you honestly, love between people of different status will only result in tragedy.”

“Stop talking nonsense! How could I ever like such a person like her? I admit that she's cute. However, she has an extremely bad character.”

Guiche suddenly looked to the front and exclaimed, “Look! They're kissing!”

Saito, shocked, immediately turned to the front. However, Wardes and Louise did not kiss.

He then looked again at Guiche. Guiche was barely controlling his laughter.

“Arggh!” Saito shouted and pounced on Guiche. Both of them fell off their horses and began fighting each other on the ground.

“Hey! If you guys continue fighting, I'll have to leave you both behind!” Wardes shouted.

Guiche quickly got back on the horse. Meanwhile, Saito, realizing that Louise was looking at him, turned his head away.

As they had been traveling at full speed and exchanged their tired horses for fresh ones several times, they reached the outskirts of La Rochelle by nightfall.

Saito looked around in astonishment. *Aren't we approaching a port? Why do I still see mountains everywhere? Maybe once we cross this mountain we should be able to see the ocean.*

Traveling under the moonlight, Saito and the group finally saw a narrow mountain pathway. Buildings which were carved from boulders could be seen on both sides of the pathway.

“Why is a port built on top of a mountain?”

Hearing Saito asking, Guiche replied sarcastically “Don't tell me that you don't even know where Albion is?”

Although Saito and Guiche were nearly reaching their physical limits, the thought of 'Once we reach town we can finally rest' gave them the strength to engage in small talk.

“Yeah, I don't know.”

“Really?” Guiche replied with laughter. But Saito did not laugh.

“I have no common knowledge of this world and please don't assume that I do.”

Suddenly, from the top of the cliff, torches were thrown at their horses. The burning torches illuminated the ravine they were about to cross.

“What's... What's happening !?” Guiche cried.

The horses, frightened by the burning torches, threw Saito and Guiche off their backs.

As they fell, a hail of arrows showered upon them.

“It's an ambush!” Guiche shouted.

Saito began to panic, just as he tried to unsheathe Derflinger, which was slung behind his back, two more arrows flew towards him.

“Whoa!”

Just as they thought they were about to meet their doom, a strong gust of wind blew towards them, changing into a small hurricane.

That same hurricane caught all the arrows and sent them away.

Wardes raised his wand.

“Are you guys all right?” Wardes shouted.

“I'm all right...” replied Saito.

Damn it! Louise's fiancée just saved my life. That sense of dismal kept expanding, causing Saito to feel inferior. He unsheathed Derflinger. The runes on his left hand started glowing again, reliving him of the exhaustion that he had been suffering.

“I'm so lonely, partner. It's too much of you to keep putting me inside the scabbard.”

Saito looked at the top of the cliff, but no arrows could be seen.

“It was most likely thieves or bandits.” Wardes said.

Louise, suddenly realizing something exclaimed, “Could it be the nobles from Albion?”

“Nobles would not use arrows.”

Just then, the sound of flapping wings could be heard. It was a sound that they were quite familiar with...

Screams could be heard from the cliffs.

Arrows could be seen shooting towards the night sky. However, all the arrows were parried away by wind magic.

After that, a small hurricane created by magic blew away all the archers.

“Hmm... Aren't those wind incantations?” Wardes mumbled to himself.

The archers, attempting to ambush them, rolled down the cliffs after being blown away by the magical tornado. They landed hard onto the ground, giving out moans of pain.

With the moon as the background, a familiar sight appeared. “It's Sylphid!” Louise shouted confoundedly.

It was Tabitha's wind dragon. After it landed, a red-haired girl jumped down from the dragon and flicked her hair.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

Louise too jumped down from Wardes' griffin and replied, “What do you mean sorry to keep you waiting!? Why are you here in the first place?”

“Not to help you in any case. When I saw you leaving the academy on the horse in the morning, I quickly woke up Tabitha and followed you all the way here.”

Kirche pointed at Tabitha, from the looks of it she was woken up from her sleep; she was still wearing her pajamas. But she didn't seem to mind at all, and was still reading a book.

“Zerbst! Listen to me, we're on a secret mission given to us by her highness!”

“Secret mission? You should have said so earlier! How would I know if you did not tell me about it? Anyways, be thankful to me, for I have apprehended the people who wanted to ambush you!”

Kirche said this while pointing to the people who were lying on the ground. Those ambushers were unable to move due to their injuries and hurled abuses towards Louise and the group. Guiche approached them and began interrogating them.

Louise, crossing her arms, gave a vicious stare at Kirche.

“Don't be mistaken! I'm not here to assist you. Am I right?”

Kirche posed suggestively, and then leaned on Wardes, who was on the griffin, and said, "Your beard makes you very manly. Do you know what passion looks like?”

Wardes glanced at Kirche and proceeded to push her away using his left hand.

“Huh?”

“Thank you for coming to our aid, but please do not get so close to me ever again.”

“But why? I just told you that I liked you!”

That was the first time that Kirche received such cold treatment from a male. Usually any male would be mesmerized after some sweet-talking from her. But Wardes was not in the least interested. Kirche gazed at Wardes with her mouth wide open.

“I'm sorry. But I cannot let my fiancée misunderstand.” Wardes said while looking at Louise; her face turned red from embarrassment in an instant.

“What? She's your fiancée!?”

Wardes nodded in response. Kirche took a closer look at Wardes. She did not realize it before, but Wardes' eyes showed no emotion at all. Just like ice.

She then looked at Saito. He looked listless and was talking to his sword rather dejectedly.

Eh? Is he looking like that because I made advances on Louise's fiancée? As she thought about that, Saito suddenly looked cuter. Looking at Saito, she ran towards him and hugged him immediately.

“Actually, I'm here because I'm worried for my beloved!”

Saito gave a bewildered look, but then quickly looked away.

“Liar.”

Is he jealous? Thinking of that, Kirche's passion in her heart burned brightly.

“Cute! So cute! Are you really jealous?”

“I'm not...”

“I'm so sorry for neglecting you. You must be angry, right?" Kirche said while pushing Saito's face into her breasts.

“Please forgive me! I may have looked at other men, but in the end, the only one that I love is you!”

Louise bit her lips, wanting to tell Kirche off. She could not tolerate Kirche for seducing her familiar.

Just then, Wardes gently placed his hands on Louise's shoulder. Wardes looked at Louise lovingly and gave her a smile.

“Viscount...”

Guiche, who was interrogating the ambushers, had just returned.

“Viscount, those ambushers admitted that they were robbers.”

“Hmm.. If they're just robbers, let them go.”

Wardes effortlessly mounted back to the top of his griffin, carrying Louise up with him. He then announced to everyone, “We'll spend the night at La Rochelle, tomorrow we will take the first ship to Albion at the break of dawn.”

Kirche sat behind Saito, sharing the same horse with him. Guiche also remounted his horse. As for Tabitha, she was still reading her book on her wind dragon.

In front of them, sandwiched between two cliffs, was the port city La Rochelle, dazzling with lights.

Chapter Five: A Rest Day Before Leaving

Tired from riding all day, they had decided to rest at the fanciest hotel in the city of La Rochelle, the Goddess’s Temple. It was a very fancy place even for a noble. The dining tables and floor were both made from the same marble and the floor was so clean that one could see their own face on it.

Wardes and Louise came back from the pier.

When Wardes sat down he said hesitantly, "The ship for Albion leaves the day after tomorrow."

"This mission is very urgent..." Louise pointed.

Saito and the rest finally relaxed, knowing tomorrow they could rest.

"I have never been to Albion so I do not know why there is no ship tomorrow."

Wardes looked at Kirche and answered to her, "Are the moons overlapping tomorrow? If so, then Albion should be closest to La Rochelle"

A worn-out Saito wondered how it might be related to the ebb and flow of the tide. The ebb and flow were regulated by the movement of the moon.

Wardes put the keys on the table, "Let's rest for now, take the keys. Tabitha and Kirche take one room, Guiche and Saito take another."

Guiche and Saito stared at each other.

Wardes continued, "Louise and I will be sharing a room."

Saito felt something tug at his heart and he turned towards Wardes.

"It is the obvious arrangement as Louise and I are engaged."

Louise looked at Wardes in shock and said, "B-but we can't! We're not even married yet!"

Saito nodded energetically, *That's right, she shouldn't sleep with him.*

But Wardes shook his head and told Louise, "There is something important I have to tell you."

Wardes and Louise stayed in the best room in the hotel. They wondered who designed the room. There was an enormous four-poster bed with delicate lace hanging from the top. Wardes sat down at the table, opened a bottle of wine and poured himself a cup. He chugged it down and said, "Why don't you sit down and have a cup as well, Louise?"

Louise sat down as well. He poured one for Louise and refilled his own. He then raised his cup and said, "Cheers!" Louise however held hers in her hands and bowed down her head.

Wardes asked, "Did you keep the princess's letter safe?"

Louise patted her pocket and to make sure it was still there, *I wonder why it is so important. What is in this letter? Does the prince already have a letter ready? I think I figured out a small part of it. Being Henrietta's childhood friend, I know how she writes her letters.*

Wardes looked at Louise with wonder. Then Louise nodded and said, "The letter is still safe. Are you worried that we might not be able to get the letter from the prince of Albion?"

"Yes, I am very worried." Wardes answered.

Louise arched her lovely eyebrows and said, "Don't worry; it will be fine because I'll always be with you."

"That's right; if you're here there will definitely be no problems. It was always that way."

Wardes sounded very distant when he said that.

"Do you still remember the promise of the day when we were at the lake?" Louise asked.

He nodded his head, "In the little boat that was floating in the middle of lake? You would always go there after being scolded by your parents. You were like an abandoned kitten."

"Really? You remember the weirdest things."

Wardes replied happily, "Of course I have to remember those things. You were always compared to your sisters in terms of magical power."

Louise lowered her head embarrassed and he said, "But I think that's wrong. You are worthless and a failure, but..."

"You are so mean!" Louise said angrily.

"You have an incredible power that nobody else has. I know this because I am a different kind of magician." Wardes finished ignoring what Louise said.

"That's impossible!"

Wardes replied, "But it is possible. For example whenever you use your magic..."

Louise's face turned red and said, "The accident about Saito?"

"Yes, when he picked up the weapon the runes on his left hand began to glow. Those runes are legendary."

"Legendary?"

"Yes, those runes belong to the legendary familiar Gandálfr. The familiar that once belonged to Founder Brimir." Wardes' eyes shone with admiration.

Louise asked, "Gandálfr?"

"Not just anyone can control Gandálfr. You have the magic to control him."

"That's hard to believe." Louise tilted her head and thought that Wardes was joking around.

Louise shook her head, thinking Wardes was joking. It is true that Saito's speed increased dramatically when he wielded a weapon, and became extremely strong, but to say he is the legendary familiar is unbelievable. If it is really like that, then something must be wrong. *I am after all "Louise the Zero"*.

I am always a failure, there is no way I could have the power Wardes mentioned.

"You could become a great mage. Yes, like Founder Brimir, and leave your name in history as a great mage. I believe so."

Wardes gazed at Louise warmly.

"After this mission, marry me Louise"

"Ah…"

The sudden marriage proposal left Louise speechless.

"I am not satisfied to be just a mage captain of the Magic Knights... I want to become a noble that will move the whole of Halkeginia some day."

"B-but..."

"But what?"

"I... I am still... still"

"You are not a child anymore, you are 16 years old. You have reached the age when you can decide things. Your father agreed too. So..."

Wardes abruptly stopped here. Then he looked up and brought his face close to Louise.

"It is true, I never came to look for you, and I have to apologize. Marriage is not something to be spoken of easily, this I also know. But Louise, to me you are the most important of all."

"Wardes…"

Louise thought about it. Why did Saito's face keep popping in her mind? After marrying Wardes, will she have to leave Saito as her familiar?

I don’t understand why, but I constantly feel this is wrong. If it was a crow or owl type of familiar it wouldn’t be so troublesome. If no one takes care of this idiot from another world, what will happen to him?

Kirche or… Saito didn’t know that Louise knew the maid from the kitchen who often fed him… They will take care of him right?

I don’t understand why but this is extremely annoying. Louise thought, just like a small girl she wanted to have Saito all to herself. *Although Saito is an idiot and often makes me mad, I don’t want him to become someone else’s property. He is mine.*

Louise raised her head.

"Still… Still…"

"Still?"

“That... that I am not a mage of your caliber yet, I still need to study…”

Louise lowered her head, kept it low and murmured.

“Wardes, when I was young, that is what I always thought, someday, I must make everyone recognize me, become a great mage, and make my mother and father proud.”

Louise raised her head, staring at the older man.

“I, I still cannot reach that yet.”

“Is it because someone already stole your heart?”

“It is nothing like that, there's no chance for that to happen!” Louise denied in a panic.

“It's not important, I understand, I understand. For now, I won’t ask for an answer. But, after this journey is over, I will certainly lighten your heart.”

Louise nodded in reply.

“In that case, let's go to bed, you are already tired right?”

Suddenly, Wardes came close to Louise, wanting to kiss her.

Instantly, Louise’s body stiffened. Then she pushed Wardes away.

“Louise?”

"I'm sorry... But, things like...that..."

Louise pridefully stared at Wardes. He smiled bitterly and shook his head.

“I am not in a hurry”

Louise lowered her head again.

Why, even though Wardes is so gentle, handsome and strong, even though I longed for him for such a long time.... Yet, I am not even happy when I am being proposed to.

Someone else had already caught her heart. But Louise's mind refused to think about the one that caught it.

Outside the window, Saito had his hand around the window bars, desperately looking at Louise and Wardes’ room.

Holding Derflinger in his left hand made his body feel light as a feather, allowing him to observe everything inside the room. Peeking through the curtains, Saito saw two figures sitting by the table.

What are they talking about? Every time Wardes’ face got closer to Louise, Saito would bite his lips. Every time when the two appeared to be about to kiss, the boy would almost stop breathing. But since Louise always denied the kiss, Saito’s breath didn’t stop either.

“Ah, closing in again, this ******, ah, so it is like that!” Saito whispered. Derflinger quietly muttered.

“How shameful.”

“Shut up.”

“My partner sticks like a green caterpillar to the window, peeking at the girl he has a crush on and her lover having a cheerful talk. It is so shameful it hurts and almost makes me cry!”

“I don’t have a crush on her! What is so good about that kind of girl? Explosive temper, treats me like a dog, twisted personality.”

Saito groaned through gritted teeth.

“Then why are we peeking?”

“I am only worried, just worried that’s all.”

With these words something fell on Saito from above.

Pa-ta

It landed on Saito’s shoulders, covering his face and obscuring his vision.

“Wha-what?”

“What are you doing here? Do you like to take strolls on the wall? Geez, took me forever to find you.”

It was Kirche who landed on his shoulder, and our hero’s eyes were blinded because his face was covered by the Germanian’s mini-skirt.

“Hey, get off me!” Saito replied as he pulled his face out of Kirche’s skirt.

“Why, is it not good? Hey, what are you looking at?”

Kirche took one look at the window, turned around to face Saito again and put her arms around him: “No, don’t peek at newlyweds, we shouldn’t care about them”

“This is what I think; a quiet date on the wall is so romantic. Look how beautiful the lights from the city are; don’t you think they are cheering for us?”

“First thing first, you get off.”

The two tried to wriggle their ways out when suddenly the window slammed open. Saito remained frozen in place and hugging the wall like a cockroach.

One look and we can see Louise with her hands placed on her hips. But, her lovely face had twisted into a demonic mask, staring at Kirche and Saito.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING NEXT TO MY WINDOW????”

Saito with his sword in one hand, another clutching the window frames. At the same time Kirche, with her legs around his shoulders, clung closely to him as if getting some weird piggyback ride.

Without question - this looked suspicious, but pretty amazing too.

“Can’t understand it even after you see it? This is a date.”

Saito tried to say something, but his lips were covered by Kirche’s hands, making him look puzzled. Louise’s shoulders started to quake in fury.

“Go, go, go, go have romance somewhere else. You, you, you two stray dogs!”

“But darling wants to have a date here.”

Kirche replied triumphantly.

In an instant Louise’s foot flew in their direction. Kirche ducked then climbed on to the wall, so the shorter girl’s foot instead connected straight with Saito’s face, sending him flying.

Luckily Saito had the sword in his hand, and thrust it into the wall to stop his falling. Then he howled in rage:

“DO YOU WANT TO KILL ME???”

“Someone like you who doesn’t understand kindness deserves to DIE!”

Wardes sat in his room and watched the whole thing with amusement.

Second day, Saito woke up to someone knocking on his door. Since Guiche was still sleeping soundly on the bed next to him, without another choice the Japanese could only climb out of the bed to answer.

There is no ship today, I wanted to spend the day sleeping, geez. Saito thought angrily as he opened the door.

Wardes with his usual hat looked down at Saito, who was about a head and a half shorter than the knight.

“Good morning, familiar.”

Louise’s fiancé calling him like this made Saito angry

Saito replied, “Morning, but the departure date is tomorrow right? Do you have anything important to say this morning? I've been riding a horse all day yesterday, I still want to sleep.”

Wardes only smiled faintly.

“Are you the Gandálfr of the legend?”

“AH.”

Saito stared at Wardes in a stunned expression.

Wardes was trying to clear something, and bent his head and said, “That case with Fouquet, I hold a great interest in you. I asked Louise earlier, I heard you are from another world and I also heard you are the legendary Gandálfr.”

“Ha.”

Who talked about Gandálfr anyway? Old Osman shouldn’t have talked about this.

“I find history and warfare extremely interesting. When Fouquet was captured, I became very interested in you. Then I did some research in the Imperial Library. The result of that research is my discovery that you are the legendary familiar Gandálfr.”

"Oh, is that so. You are really a scholar."

“I want to know how strong is the person who captured Fouquet; can you show it to me?”

“Show you?”

Wardes pulled out his wand from his belt, “Let me put it this way.”

“A duel?” Saito replied with an icy smile.

“Exactly.”

Wardes and Saito smiled together. Taking one look at the still sleeping Guiche, the Japanese boy thought *I am not sure just how strong Wardes is anyway, but I have beaten Guiche already and captured Fouquet. He is the Captain of the Magic Knights, and looks like he has some abilities too. But I shouldn’t be so far behind.*

Let's show Louise’s fiancé what Gandálfr is capable of Saito thought.

“Where do you want to duel?”

“This hotel used to be a castle designed for repelling Albion invasions, there is a parade ground in the center of it.”

The two then left for the parade ground for nobles together. The ancient practice ground was now a place for debris and refuse with empty beer barrels and crates scattered all over the place. It was hard to believe that a long time before that royal flags with staffs cut from stone were decorating this wasteland.

“Before, maybe you don’t know, under the reign of Philip III, this often used to be a place to host duels between nobility.”

“Ha Ha.”

Saito took out Derflinger from his shoulder and the rune on his left hand flared into light.

“In a time long ago, the king still had the power to duel, Nobles from the king’s time… a time when Nobles were noble. Who risked life for fame and honor, we nobles fought with magic. But it is usually fought over boring issues, right, as if the two were fighting for a lover.”

Suddenly Saito’s face grew serious, pulled out his sword, but Wardes stopped him with his left hand.

“What?”

“There are certain rules regarding dueling, we don’t have a witness here.”

“Witness?”

“Calm down, one is coming” Wardes replied, and Louise appeared from nearby. She was dumbfounded as she saw the two.

“Wardes, you called me over and I came, what are you two preparing to do?”

“I want to test his abilities a little.”

“Really, let’s stop this nonsense. Now is not the time for these kind of stupidities.”

“It is true, but the noble-born wants a duel, he really wants to find out if I am strong or weak.”

Louise stared at her familiar, “Stop now, that is an order.”

Saito did not reply, only stared at Wardes.

“What? Really?”

“Since the witness is here, let us begin."

Wardes pulled out his wand from his belt again, entered a combat stance, with his wand pointing at Saito.

Saito responded “I'm not that reliable, so I don’t know how to go hard or light.”

Wardes responded with a light laughter, “No problem, hit me with everything.”

Saito pulled out Derflinger and leapt forward with a slash. The magic knight parried the attack with his wand, and the two weapons rang solidly as steel clashed steel, sending sparks in all directions. While Wardes’ weapon was merely a small wand, he was able to block Saito’s long sword without a sweat.

One would have expected Wardes to retreat backward, but no one expected the hurricane-like wind that was caused when the two clashed, and Wardes' increased speed as he charged toward Saito. The Japanese boy responded with a chopping strike that broke Wardes’ advance, with the black cape of the Magic Knights flipping in the wind. The captain in response leapt a few steps back, and then reversed back to his stance.

Why isn’t that guy using his magic? Saito thought.

Derflinger mumbled in response, “You can’t make it, he is looking down on you.”

Saito’s heart burst in fury. *Wardes that bastard, he can have the same speed as me with the Gandálfr runes glowing*. With only one exchange, Saito could tell the difference between Guiche and Wardes.

“A Magic Knight isn’t someone who only chants magic.” Wardes answered with a tip of his hat.

“The way we chant is fully specialized for battle, the way we hold our wands, the motion we use to charge… the way we use our wands as swords, complete with spellcraft. This is the basic of the basics for soldiers.”

Saito lowered his body slightly, and began to spin his blade like a windmill. Wardes apparently already saw through Saito’s attack style, and parried the next attack without even taking a breath.

“You are really fast; no one can mistake you for a commoner, truly the familiar of the legends.” Blocking Saito’s blow, Wardes used his wand and swung at the back of Saito’s head. With his brain and nose on fire, the Japanese boy collapsed on the ground with a thud.

“But this is it, you are fast, but your movements are those of an amateur, you cannot beat a real mage with this.”

Saito leapt forward like a bullet and released a brand new assault.

But, with one step aside and a jump, Wardes easily dodged Saito again with the speed of the wind.

“In other words, you are unable to protect Louise.” For the first time, Wardes entered combat stance, with a speed impossible for a normal person to track, launched an attack on Saito. Just as the boy realized what was going on, he took the full attack head on.

“Dell yill soll la windy.” With one hand waving the sparking wand, Wardes chanted with a low voice.

Saito realized Wardes’ movement and attack all followed a pattern.

“Partner! Bad news! Magic is coming!” Derflinger screamed, when he realized the whisper chant was magic…

Bam, suddenly the winds rushed together, creating an invisible force that slammed into Saito with the strength of a hammer, knocking him a good 10 meters away and into a pile of beer barrels, smashing all of them as he crashed down.

In the instant Saito landed on the wine barrels he dropped his sword. As Saito tried to retrieve the weapon, Wardes stepped on it, then struck Saito with the wand. Derflinger screamed “Get your foot of me!”, but Wardes paid it no heed and spoke, “Did you find out who is the winner and loser?”

Saito tried to get up, but the pain prevented him from moving. The boy then realized that blood was flowing down his head.

Louise fearfully came over.

“Do you understand Louise? He cannot protect you.” Wardes told her calmly.

“Because... because aren't you the commander of the Magic Knights? The secret group that was assigned to protect the queen?? Isn't it natural to be strong?"

“True, but aren’t you going to Albion and might do battle? When you are surrounded by strong enemies, you also plan to say ‘we are weak, please put away your wands?’”

Louise became silent, and then looked at Saito with worry. From his head came more fresh blood and the little girl drew out her handkerchief in a panic, but was stopped by Wardes.

“Leave him, Louise.”

Wardes grabbed on to Louise’s hands.

“But…”

"Let's leave him there for a bit."

Louise hesitantly bit her lips for a moment and, with another tug from Wardes, left.

Saito was left behind, on his knees, unable to move a single bit.

Derflinger quipped, “Total defeat.”

Saito didn’t respond. Losing in front of Louise made him very sad.

“But that noble is very strong! Don’t worry about it partner, that guy has a lot of skill. Maybe even a Square Mage. Even if you lost, it is not shameful.”

Yet, even if this was true, Saito said nothing.

“Losing in front of the girl you have a crush on is truly a despicable event. But don’t look so down, or I will cry as well... Hey, I remember something, what was it? It happened a long time ago… Oh that! Wait!”

Saito put Derflinger back to his sheath, silencing it in the process. Dusting off his pants, the boy took a heavy step forward.

That night, Saito stared at the moon from his balcony window. Guiche and company were drinking in the bar on the first floor. Tomorrow they were heading for Albion, so everyone was partying below. Kirche came with an invitation, but he refused. Our hero had little heart for drinking now.

Apparently, the group could leave with the two moon eclipses; it was the day in which Albion was closest to the world.

Saito looked up to the starlit night sky, in the sea of stars, the pink moon hid behind the white moon, and thus became one moon sparking with a peach color. That moon reminded him of the one of his homeland, the moon of Earth.

The depressed Saito never stopped mumbling, wanting to go home, to go back to his homeland. Also, losing to Wardes in front of Louise made Saito more homesick than ever.

Without realizing it, tears were falling from Saito's eyes. The tears rolled down his face past his chin then fell on to the ground. The boy continued to cry as he stared at the moons, then he heard something behind him.

"Saito."

Turning around, he saw Louise standing behind him with her arms crossed.

"…Just because you lost does not mean you should cry, that is unbecoming."

The boy in response wiped his face, not wanting Louise to see his tears.

"That's not right."

"What is not right?"

"I am only doing it because I am homesick. To return to Earth. To return to Japan."

Louise lowered her head.

"…I know, it is my fault."

"You are just treating me like a dog."

“There is nothing I can do about it, I am a member of the nobility, and if I don’t do it there would be rumors.”

“So what is the way to return me to my old world? I really don’t want to be in this world anymore.”

Saito muttered in an unpleasant tone, which came from the bottom of his heart.

“…What, you know you are very troublesome for me too.”

“If you say so, then help me find a way back. Promise me you will find a way to send me to my original world.”

“…When this mission is over, I will do my best to find you a way home.”

“Really?”

Louise put her arms around her belt, nodding her head in a cute expression.

“I am a member of the nobility, I will not lie.”

“But what happens if I cannot find a way back?”

Her face reddened a little, Louise hardened her heart and replied, “…If that happens, I will ask you to continue to serve me.”

“Even if you are married?”

“This has nothing to do with marriage.”

Louise stared at Saito.

Saito commented with a little sarcastic humor, “Ok ok, a person like you, with such an awful personality and there is a person who is willing to marry you, that noble is really a miracle. You are really lucky.”

Louise raised her arms with a tint of anger, “What? Didn’t Kirche fall in love with you? That idiot can fall in love with you. Forget it, no matter what can be said, both of you are morons and would make a lovely pair.”

The two turned away from each other. Louise closed her eyes, calmed herself

and spoke, “In summary, during the time you are in Halkeginia, you are my familiar. So regardless of the fact I get married or not, it is your duty to protect me and do laundry as well as other duties.”

Saito turned around to face Louise.

Under that peach colored hair, Louise’s tea-green eyes sparked with fury. Her normally pale face was also tinted with color of anger, which made her puckered lips extremely cute.

Saito’s heart began to race as he stared at her. He did get yelled at by Louise, but she was still so beautiful.

But is it truly only this? Just because she is beautiful, my heart is racing? I feel it is not just this alone. No matter how beautiful she is, how cute, when I hear such hurtful words my heart should not race.

Louise held her hands together. The red faced Louise. The Louise who nursed me. The Louise who confronted Fouquet's golem despite being a zero. The self-ashamed Louise that cries secretly when being called zero...

Occasionally, Louise shows up as a real girl that combines courage, kindness and beauty in herself.

Saito thought really deeply, “Then why is it really this way?”

He finally understood why he had been staring at the moon every night until tonight, yet never thinking about going home.

But, he really hated wanting to admit this reason.

This really sucks!

*Why would I…*Saito could not stop the line of thought.

Spontaneously, Saito asked, “Why don’t you just let Wardes protect you?”

“Amazing, you are still not over losing to him?”

Saito remained silent.

“You are MY FAMILIAR right? Just because you lost, you have to be strong. That defeated look would sully the la Vallière name.”

It was not as simple as being defeated. It was losing in front of Louise, and losing to her fiancé. How could he still be strong? Saito curled his lips, and angrily slammed the balcony frame.

Louise replied angrily, “Ok, I understand. Do what you like, I will let Wardes protect me.”

“Ok, be like that.” Saito countered maliciously, and this line made Louise even angrier.

“That person is really reliable. He won’t make me worry. I don’t have to tell a familiar like you, but I will tell you now. Now I have decided, I will marry Wardes.”

Louise looked at Saito, but Saito remained silent, not caring. *What?* Louise thought.

“I am going to marry Wardes.”

Louise repeated herself again, but Saito remained silent and didn’t say anything. With his head lowered in anger.

At first she expected Saito to say something to stop her, but he didn’t even say a single word.

What? Haven't you already crawled into my bed?! Louise thought. She got even more unhappy as her pride had been hurt.

“A person like you should spend the rest of your life staring at the moon!” Louise howled as she dashed away.

Just at this moment…

“WOAH!” Saito shouted. Louise turned her head around, and to her surprise, something appeared that swallowed the moon, and it was nowhere to be seen.

Beneath the moon’s shadow, there appeared to be a giant. When they looked at it

closely, the huge shadow turned out to be a golem made of stone. The person controlling the golem turned out to be…

“Fouquet!” Saito and Louise shouted in unison. The figure above them sat on the golem’s shoulder, cheerfully answered, “Oh, it is such an honor to be remembered!”

The sword on Saito’s shoulder asked, “Shouldn’t you be rotting in jail?”

Fouquet shouted back, “Somebody had a kind heart, a beauty like myself should be contriving to the welfare of the world, so they let me escape.”

It was dark so not many people could see it, but there was a figure in the black cape of nobility standing next to the woman. Was that guy the person who helped her escape? The noble supported Fouquet’s actions, but remained silent. Because the figure wore a mask, no one could see anything clear, but it appeared to be a man.

“…So you are someone who can’t mind her own business, what are you doing here?” Saito brandished his sword with his left hand.

“I am here to thank you for the long vacation you gave me, I am here to send you my appreciation!”

Fouquet howled in laughter, as the huge golem pulverized the fence on the balcony with one hit. The fence was carved right out of solid stone, so it appeared the power of the golem had increased significantly.

“There is stone, not dirt, so calm down!”

“No one is trying to be calm here!”

Saito grabbed Louise’s hand and ran away, escaping the room, the duo leaped down the stairs.

Meanwhile, the room below became a pandemonium.

Suddenly a group of soldiers came to assault Wardes and company who were drinking.

Guiche, Kirche, Tabitha and Wardes were using magic to defend themselves. However, there were too many people. It appeared every soldier from La Rochelle came attacking.

It seemed like they were losing.

Kirche broke one of the table's legs, and decided to use the table as a shield against the coming foes. The attacking soldiers were used to fighting magic-using foes already. While they were fighting, they observed Kirche and her allies range and style. Then moved out the magic's range to attack with bows. The soldiers hidden from the dark had the advantage of the field, leaving those inside the room a bitter battle.

If anyone stood up to chant magic, they were answered with a torrential volley of arrows.

Saito lowered his body, charged to Kirche's shield-table wall, letting her know Fouquet was above them and attacking, but the giant's huge feet were already visible, so there was no need to tell them.

The other nobles and guests were hiding under the counter and shaking in fear. The fat innkeeper called out to the soldiers, "What are you doing to my establishment??" But one arrow slammed into his shoulder, leaving him slumped on the ground.

"This is really troublesome." Listening to Wardes' words, Kirche nodded.

"It appears this band is not only just interested in a simple little robbery."

"Maybe Fouquet and Albion's nobles are behind this?"

Kirche raised her wand, and mumbled, "…Those guys are planning for us to use our magic, exhaust ourselves then come in with a charge, what can we do?"

"My Valkyries will protect us."

"Guiche, your Valkyries are only a small squad, these are seasoned mercenaries."

"If we don't try we will never know."

"But Guiche, if it comes to warfare I am a far better expert than you are."

"But I am the son of General de Gramont, how could I lose to this band of idiot soldiers?"

"This is intolerable, the nobles of Tristain are only tough with their words, but their actual combat capabilities are pretty weak."

Guiche stood up, preparing to chant his magic. But Wardes stopped him by grabbing on to the young noble's shirt.

"Everyone listen carefully." Wardes whispered. Saito and the others became

silent to listen.

“This mission counts as complete if one half of the group arrives safely at the destination.”

At this moment the cute Tabitha also closed her book and looked at Wardes’ direction. The girl used her staff and pointed at herself, Kirche and Guiche and uttered one word, “Bait.”

Then Tabitha continued and pointed at Saito, Wardes, and Louise, then uttered another word, “Go to the harbor.”

“The time?” Wardes asked the young girl.

“We will carry it out right now.”

“Just like we planned a while ago, go from the backdoor.”

“Ah? AH!” Saito and Louise shouted out in surprise.

“They are responsible for holding the situation; we should be able to confuse their sight. Using this time we should be able to escape toward the harbor, just like that.”

“But…But…”

Saito looked at Kirche, and the girl ran her hand through her red hair. And puckered her lips then added, “Bah, can’t help it anyway, we really didn’t want to go to Albion with you anyway.”

Guiche sniffed at his rose, “Heh, I might die here. What would happen then? If I die then I won’t be able to meet Princess Henrietta again.”

Tabitha nodded at Saito. “Go.”

“But..”

Kirche began to push Saito, “Ok, time to go. When you come back…I will let you kiss me.”

Then, she turned around to face Louise, “Ah, Louise, please don’t make any

misinterpretation of this, I am not here to be bait for you.”

”I know, I know!” Although she said it, Louise still lowered her head in a salute to Kirche and others.

Saito and the others lowered their body to the floor, and began to run. Arrows flew in their direction, but with a wave of Tabitha’s wand, the roaring wind protected them from the onslaught.

The group fled from the bar into the kitchen and toward the other exit, and then there was a huge explosion behind them.

“…Looks like it has begun.” Louise mouthed.

Wardes crouched close to the door, then listened at the situation outside.

“There doesn’t appear to be anyone.”

Opening the door, the three leapt into the night streets of La Rochelle.

“The docks are this way.”

Wardes was in the lead, Louise followed behind. Saito came in the back.

Under the moonlight, the trio’s shadow extended, and followed closely behind.

Chapter Six: The White Country

After making sure Saito and company were running, Kirche commanded Guiche, “Now then, it’s time to begin. Guiche, there’s a pot filled with oil in the kitchen somewhere, right?”

“You mean those frying pots?”

“Yep. Bring them over with your golems.”

“No sweat.” Guiche hid behind a table, waving his rose, which was his wand. The petals fell slowly and female bronze warriors sprouted from the ground. The golems headed towards the kitchen, even though arrows were aimed at them.

The steel arrowheads burrowed into soft copper, causing the statues to wobble. Guiche laughed, as the statues finally reached the kitchen behind the counter, and picked up the frying pot.

“Can you throw that at the entrance?” Kirche put on make up looking at a mirror while talking.

“You’re putting on make up now, of all times?” Guiche said, a shocked look on his face, but still commanded his statue to throw the pot at the entrance as he was told.

Kirche brandished her wand and stood up.

“Because the play is about to begin, and if the female lead has no make up on...”

She waved her wand at the oil, now sprinkled in the air.

“...wouldn’t that be embarrassing?”

Kirche’s magic lit up the oil, spreading flames all over the Goddess’s Temple, making a loud noise. In an instant, a group of mercenaries, once bent on

advancing, retreated from the sudden fire.

Kirche seductively sang a spell, waving her wand again. The flames burned even fiercer, spreading towards the mercenaries at the entrance, enveloping them and causing them to roll around in pain. Kirche stood and elegantly flicked her hair before raising her wand. Although all the arrows flew towards her, Tabitha's wind magic parried them all.

"Dear unnamed mercenaries, although I have no idea why you're attacking us," Kirche smiled and bowed in the rain of arrows, "please let me, Kirche the Ardent, graciously be your opponent!"

Sitting on her enormous earth golem's shoulder, Fouquet bit her lip in annoyance. The group she just ordered to attack instantly came back in confusion after being surrounded with fire. She turned to the hooded masked noble sitting beside her. "Geez, making a fuss just because of this level of fire... hired hands just aren't dependable."

"That's enough anyway."

"But you can't beat them like this!"

"It's alright even if they can't. All they have to do is separate them."

"Even if you say so, I won't let this go on. I took so much humiliation because of them."

The hooded man did not answer, instead standing up as if he heard nothing, and talking to Fouquet, "Alright, I'm going after the Vallière girl."

"Then what am I going to do?" Fouquet answered in shock.

"Whatever you like. Burn or cook the rest, whatever. We'll meet up at the usual restaurant." He casually jumped off the golem's shoulder, disappearing into the darkness like the midnight wind, soft and chilling.

“Geez...what a laidback guy. Can’t tell me anything he’s thinking about.” Fouquet spoke silently in disgust.

Moans came from the men below. Strong winds came from inside the temple, spreading and strengthening the violent flames. Even the archers hiding in the darkness felt the burn.

Fouquet yelled below her, “Dammit, that’s enough! You’re all useless! Get out of my way!”

The golem rose with a thundering noise, and moved towards the entrance, raising its fists over its head as it advanced.

Kirche and Tabitha controlled the flames in the hall, forcefully tormenting the mercenaries outside. The group of archers outside also fled from the fire spread by Tabitha’s wind, leaving their bows behind.

“Ohhhhohohohoho! Oho! Ohohoho!” Kirche laughed victoriously. “You see it? You get it now? The power of my flames! If you don’t want to get burned, you better run home now! Ahahaha!”

“Alright, my turn!” after making an untimely appearance, just as Guiche aimed at the retreating enemies in between the gaps of the flames for his “Valkyrie” spell...

With a loud, thunderous noise, the entrance and beyond disappeared.

“Eh?”

A huge golem emerged from the flying dust, and easily kicked away Guiche’s statues.

“Oh, I forgot. That tough missy’s still here.” Kirche said silently, sticking out her tongue.

“Don’t be too arrogant, kids! I’ll finish you off!” Fouquet yelled in anger,

standing on her golem’s shoulder.

“What do we do now?” Kirche turned to Tabitha’s direction. Her friend laid out both hands and shook her head.

Guiche took one look at the enormous golem, and sank into a fervent panic, yelling, “Everyone! Attack! I say, ATTACK! Now is the time for them to see the spirit of all Tristainian nobility! Watch me, father! Guiche will become a man!”

Tabitha tripped him with her staff, sending him crashing on the ground.

“What are you doing?! Let me be a man! In the name of Her Royal Highness, let my rose wither here!”

“Alright, we got to go.”

“No! I will not run!”

“...you know, you’re exactly the type that would die in any battle first.”

Tabitha looked at the approaching golem, and suddenly seemed to reach an idea. She then pulled on Guiche’s sleeve.

“What?”

“Rose.” Tabitha pointed at Guiche’s fake rose, making a waving motion in the process. “A lot. Of petals.”

“What do you want with those petals?!” Guiche yelled, only to have his ear pulled by Kirche.

“Just do what Tabitha says!”

Guiche waved his rose wand in annoyance, sending large amounts of petals flying in the air. Tabitha sang a spell. Under her wind’s direction, the petals stuck onto the golem.

“And what does sticking petals all over the golem do?! Sure it’s pretty!” Guiche yelled back.

Tabitha concisely ordered Guiche. “Alchemy.”

On the golem’s shoulder, Fouquet, seeing her creation stuck all over with petals, annoyingly complained, “What’s this? A present? I’m not letting up even if you decorate my golem with petals!”

The golem raised a fist, and smashed the table that shielded Kirche, Tabitha, and Guiche in one blow.

At that moment, the tangled petals all turned into liquid. The smell of oil crept up to her. As a master of the “earth” element, Fouquet instantly realized the reason. A spell known as “Alchemy.”

They just used “Alchemy” to turn the petals on the golem into oil.

She was too late to realize that something was wrong. Kirche’s fireball was already flying towards her golem.

In an instant, the huge golem was covered in fire. Unable to withstand the heat and flames, the golem fell on its knees.

Seeing their employer in a losing position, the mercenaries fled like spiders. Kirche, Tabitha, and Guiche held their hands in joy.

“We did it! We won!”

“I... I won with alchemy! Father! Your Majesty! Guiche has triumphed!”

“That’s all because of Tabitha’s plan!” Kirche poked on Guiche’s head.

A hideous Fouquet stood up in front of her burned golem. “H... how dare you... beat me, Fouquet, twice, with earth magic...” She looked pitiful. With her long, beautiful hair burned away, her robes singed with holes everywhere, and her face charred a dark black, the beauty had left her.

“Aha, that’s some nice make up you have on. You know, lady, this heavy make up kinda suits you! I mean... you’re pretty old already!” As Kirche finished, she waved her wand at Fouquet. However, she seemed to have depleted her energy with all the spells she used in battle. Suddenly, a small, weak flame flew out, and disappeared in an instant.

“Eh? That’s it?” Kirche scratched her head.

Tabitha and Guiche seemed to have the same effect. But not Fouquet. She didn't try any spells, and simply moved straight at them.

"Call me old?! Girl, I'm only 23!" Fouquet tightened her fists, and punched at Kirche, who retaliated much the same way without hesitation. And so the two fought completely unlike themselves.

Tabitha sat down, and, with absolutely no interest in the fight in front of her, started reading.

Guiche watched the two beautiful women fighting, a mild blush on his face. He seemed indifferent to his clothes being a total mess.

Watching from far away, the mercenaries began betting on the match.

As Kirche and Fouquet beat up each other, Saito and company ran towards the harbor, their road illuminated by the bright moon. Wardes ran towards a certain building's long stairs, and began walking up them.

"Aren't we heading towards some 'harbor'? Why are we climbing a hill?" Asked Saito. Wardes did not answer.

After climbing a long flight of stairs, they arrived on top of a small hill. Seeing everything in front of him, Saito gasped.

It was a huge tree, branching out in every direction. It had the size of a mountain. How tall was it? The night covered its top, but it had considerable height. Saito looked at the tree as if it were Tokyo Tower.

And then... taking a closer look between the branches, the tree seemed to be holding something even larger. A huge fruit? He was wrong. It was a ship. It looked like a zeppelin, stuck between the trees.

"This is the 'harbor'? And... that's the 'ship'?" Saito asked in shock.

Louise replied in surprise. "Yeah... isn't your world like that?"

“Harbors and ships all stay on water in my world.”

“If there are ships that sail on water, there are ships that sail in the air.” Louise said matter-of-factly.

Wardes ran to the tree’s roots, which were as big and spacious as a skyscraper’s lobby. They probably dug the middle out of a dead tree to make this.

It was night, so they couldn’t see anyone. Between each flight of stairs were metal panels, with writing of some sort on them. *Maybe station signs or something,* Saito thought.

Wardes began climbing the stairs in front of him.

One flight of wooden stairs was connected to another. There were scaffolding and supports on them, but they still looked worryingly dangerous. One could see La Rochelle’s lights in the spaces between each flight of stairs.

In a rest stop midway, Saito heard footsteps behind them. He turned around, and a shadow jumped, flying over him and landed behind Louise.

It was the white-masked man on Fouquet’s golem.

Saito pulled out his sword and cried, “LOUISE!”

Louise turned around. The man picked her up the next instant.

“Ahhhh-----!” Louise screamed. Saito raised his sword. *But if I just slash it like that, I’ll hit Louise.* The man carried Louise and jumped much like a acrobat would, his body moving wherever he wished.

Saito stood still. Beside him, Wardes waved his staff. The masked man, like Saito a while ago, was blown away, hit by Wardes’ air hammer, and let Louise go. He held on to a support, but Louise fell towards the ground.

In an instant, Wardes jumped off from the platform, and dove towards Louise like a grebe[9]. He caught up with her and floated in the air while carrying her.

The masked man bent around, jumped on the platform, and faced Saito. His build was not too different from Wardes’. He pulled out a staff from his waist. It

was a black staff.

After making sure Louise was safe, Saito went on guard, remembering his battle against Wardes. Swinging the sword around is outright dangerous, but he couldn’t foresee what magic his opponent would use against him.

The man waved his staff. The air above him began to cool. Freezing air irritated Saito’s skin. *What is he doing?*

He continued to chant a spell. Saito raised his sword, but Derflinger yelled, “Get on guard, partner!”

As Saito got on guard, the air shook. There was a crack. Lightning emanated from the man and hit Saito directly.

“‘Lightning Cloud’!” Derflinger cried, recognising the spell. A strong current went through Saito’s body and he fell from the platform.

“Gaaaahhh---!” Saito cried in pain. His left wrist felt like it was scorched and burned as if he had touched a red-hot branding iron. The current left a trail, burning his clothes. He fainted from the pain and fright.

Wardes, holding Louise, chanted the “Fly” spell, safely landing Saito on the ground.

“SAITO!” Louise cried, watching her familiar fall. Wardes bit his lip, turned to the masked man, and waved his staff. It was the air hammer. The air around him solidified into invisible blocks, striking the masked man. He fell off the platform and towards the ground.

Louise struggled out of Wardes' grip and ran to Saito. A gash from the current continued to burn Saito’s left hand, where he held his sword, from the sleeve straight up to his elbow. She frantically put her ear at his chest. His heart was beating, and she breathed a sigh of relief. He took a very heavy current, but seems to have survived, moaning in pain.

Saito opened his eyes, and painfully stood up. “W-what... that guy... but, it hurts... gah!”

Derflinger spoke in concern, “That was ‘Lightning Cloud’. Very strong wind

magic. That guy looks like an expert to me.”

“Ah! Ugh!” Saito’s face twisted in pain.

Wardes looked to Saito’s condition. “But he was lucky to survive with just his wrist injured. This spell usually kills. Hmm... looks like your sword neutralized some of the current, but I’m not sure why. Isn’t the sword made of metal?”

“No idea. I forgot.” Derflinger replied.

“An intelligent sword, huh. Rare stuff.”

Saito bit his lip hard. His injured wrist hurt, but the fact that he could do nothing to save Louise hurt more. Plus, he let Wardes steal the whole show. He couldn’t let Louise look at him like this anymore. He barely stood up, and sheathed Derflinger.

“Let's go. I-it doesn’t matter now.”

Behind the last flight of stairs was a branch. On that branch, a ship... just docked there. It was shaped more like a yacht, perhaps to let it fly. There were wings on the sides. From the ship dangled who-knows-how-many ropes, all tied onto the branches. The branch they were standing on extended all the way to the ship’s deck.

They stepped on board, and a sailor sleeping on the deck climbed up. “Hey you! What are you doing?!”

“Where’s the captain?”

“He’s sleeping. Come back in the morning.” The man replied frostily and drunkenly, and drank from his rum bottle.

Wardes did not answer, and pulled his staff out. “You want a noble to repeat what he just said? I said get the captain!”

“A n-noble!!” The sailor stood up immediately and ran for the captain’s quarters.

After a while, he brought back a sleepy, fifty-something old man with a hat on. He seemed to be the captain. “What do you want?” He looked at Wardes suspiciously.

“Leader of Her Majesty’s Mage Guard, Captain Wardes.”

The captain’s eyes bulged, and he switched to more formal words after learning Wardes' identity as a noble of high caliber. “Oh, uh... then, what services may this ship perform for you...”

“Take us to Albion. Depart now.”

“Madness!”

“This is upon Her Majesty’s orders. Are you going against the Royal Court?”

“I don’t know what you’re going to Albion for, but we can’t depart until morning!”

“Why?”

“Albion’s the closest to Tristainia in the morning! We don’t have enough wind stones to get there from here right now.”

“Wind stones?” asked Saito.

The captain gave him a 'you-don’t-know-what-a-wind-stone-is?' look and answered, “Stones that store wind magic. This ship can’t fly without them.” He then turned to Wardes. “Your Excellency, this ship only has enough wind stones in store to travel the shortest distance to Albion. If we had more, we could have gone earlier. But for now, we cannot depart. We’ll drop out of the sky while halfway there.”

“I’ll make up for however much you lack in wind stones. I’m a square wind mage.”

The captain and his sailors looked at each other. The captain then turned to Wardes and nodded. “Then that’s fine. You will have to pay, though.”

“What’s the cargo?”

“Sulfur. Right now, it’s worth its weight in gold. The nobles have increased the price in desperation for security. To have that, gunpowder and fire elements are a must.”

“Sell all of that to me at that price.”

The captain nodded, perhaps with a devious smile. With the deal done, the captain made one order after another. “Leave port! Untie anchors! Set sail!”

The sailors followed orders, all the while complaining under their breath. They expertly removed the ropes from the branches, climbed to the securing ropes on both sides, and released the sails.

Without the ties, the ship suddenly sank, and then floated again with the power of the wind stones.

“When can we reach Albion?” Wardes asked.

“We’ll arrive at Scarborough Port tomorrow at noon.” The captain replied.

Saito looked at the ground from the port side. The “harbor” could be seen between the huge tree’s branches. La Rochelle’s lights soon faded into darkness. They seemed to be traveling rather fast.

Louise approached Saito, and put a hand on his shoulder. “Saito, are you okay?” She worriedly looked at him.

“Don’t touch me.” He pushed her hand away. Louise’s face reddened.

“What?! And I was worried about you!” Louise went mad, seeing as Saito wouldn’t even look at her. *"And I got all worried about you... what’s with that attitude?"* She thought.

Saito was depressed. He couldn’t do a thing when Louise was about to be taken away by that white-masked man. He couldn’t face her. He remembered what Wardes told him a few days ago, *“In other words, you are unable to protect Louise.”*

Is that so? He sank.

Wardes approached them. “From what I heard from the captain, the Albion Royal Army near Newcastle was completely surrounded and is fighting an uphill battle.”

Louise, clearly scared, asked, “What about Prince Wales?”

Wardes shook his head. “I’m not sure. He seems to be alive.....”

“Wait... isn’t the harbor completely taken over by the rebels?”

“Yeah.”

“Then how can we contact the Royal Family?”

“We’ll just have to fight our way out. It takes only a day on horseback from Scarborough to Newcastle.”

“Fighting out of the rebels?”

“Right. That’s the only choice we have. They can’t really openly attack the Tristainian nobility, I think. We’ll have to find a chance to break out of their circle and run straight for Newcastle. All we have to think about then is riding in the dark.”

Louise anxiously nodded, and asked, “Speaking of which, Wardes, where’s your griffin?”

Wardes smiled. He leaned out portside, and whistled. From right under the ship came the sound of the griffin’s wings. It landed onto the deck, scaring some of the sailors.

“Can’t we just get to Albion on the griffin instead of the ship?” asked Saito.

“It’s not a dragon. It can’t fly that far.” Louise answered.

Saito sat near the mast and closed his eyes. *Looks like we’ll be in danger again soon. Oh well... I’ll just go to sleep.* he thought. With the talk between Louise and Wardes like a lullaby, he fell asleep.

Saito woke up to the sailors' noises and blinding light, and a bright, blue sky in front of him. Looking down the ship, he could see floating clouds. The ship sailed right above them.

"Albion in sight!" the lookout bellowed.

Saito rubbed his sleepy eyes, and looked down again. All there was were clouds. Ground was nowhere to be seen.

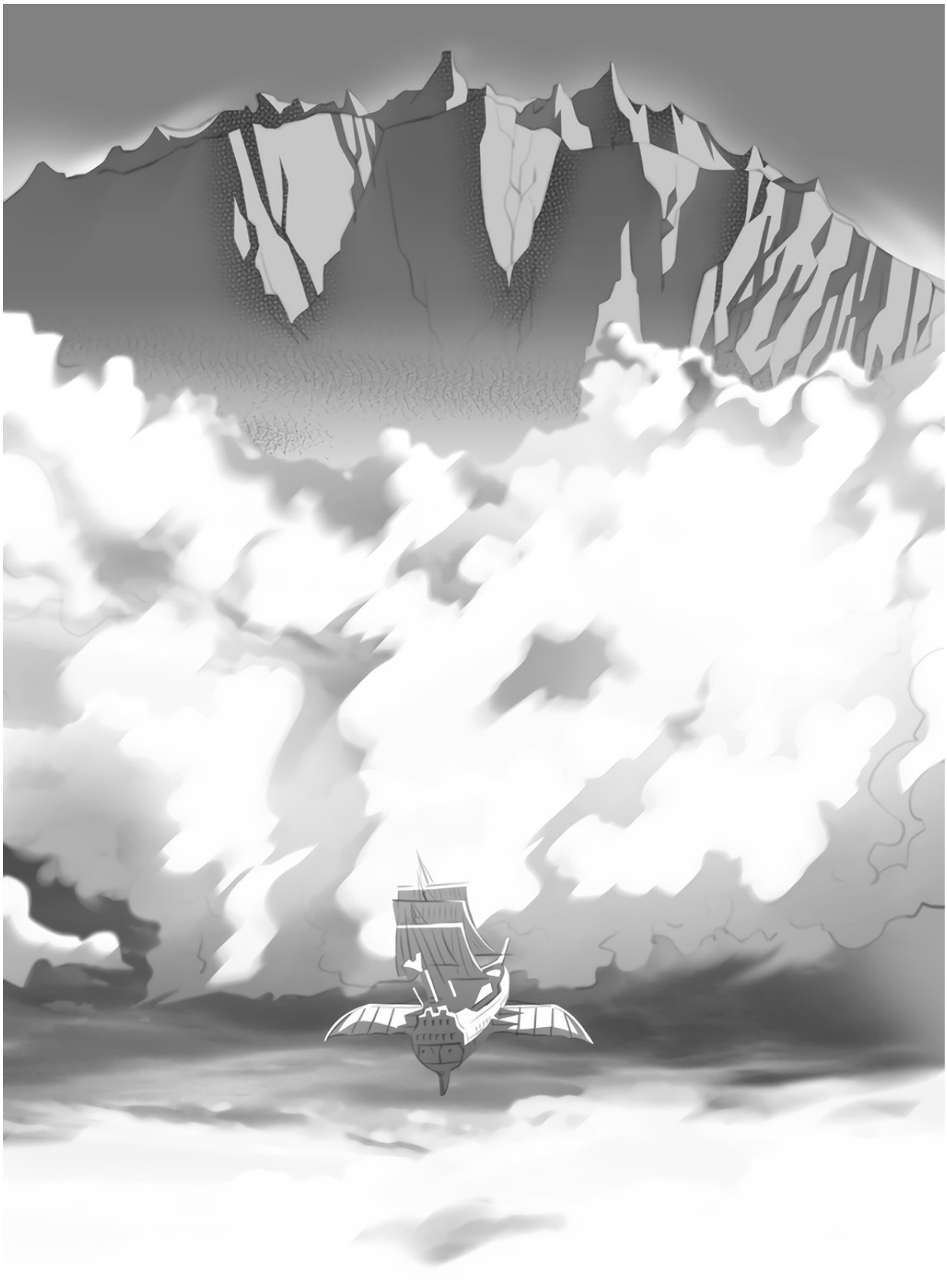
Louise, who seemed to have been sleeping beside him, stood up.

"I can't see ground anywhere." Saito complained.

"There!" She pointed up towards the sky.

"Huh?" He followed where she pointed, and gasped in shock. A huge... well, nothing but a huge sight greeted his eyes.

From between the clouds he could see dark land. It continued to expand under them. Mountains carved the landscape, and rivers flowed down them.



“Did that frighten you?” Louise asked him.

“Ah... I’ve... never seen anything like this before.” Saito’s jaw dropped as he stood gaping.

“Albion, the floating island. It floats in the air, just like that, usually over oceans. However, it passes by over the Halkeginian continent a few times every month. It’s about the size of Tristainia, and it’s nicknamed ‘The White Country’.”

“Why ‘The White Country’?”

Louise pointed towards the island. “The water from the rivers flows off the island into the air, and while doing so becomes white fog, covering the bottom part of the island. The fog turns into clouds, which give Halkeginia its rainfall,” Louise explained.

The lookout yelled again, “Ship approaching starboard side!”

Saito looked towards that direction. A ship was, as he said, approaching, and it was many measures larger than the one they’re on. Cannons jutted out of holes on its portside.

“Ah... they even have cannons.” Saito spoke his thoughts.

Louise frowned.

“Not good. A rebel... or is that a noble vessel?” Behind deck, Wardes and the captain looked at where the lookout was pointing.

Black paint signaled that the ship was made for war. Twenty or so cannons aimed at them.

“Albionian nobility? Tell us if they ship cargo like we do.”

The lookout hoisted the signal flags as the captain told. The black ship did not respond.

The co-captain entered running, his face pale, and reported to the captain, “That ship doesn’t have any nationality flags!”

“Then... are they pirates?”

“Can’t be wrong! I heard they got really active after the rebellion began...”

“Run! Full speed!” The captain wanted to run from them as quickly as possible, but they were too late. The black ship began to sail parallel to them, and fired a shot directly ahead of them.

BANG! The cannonball disappeared into the clouds. The black ship’s mast then hoisted a four-color signal.

“They’re ordering us to stop, captain.”

The captain winced in his decision. It’s not like his ship was completely unarmed, but all they had were three movable cannons on deck, which were no more useful than decorations when up against a full broadside of over twenty pointed at them. The captain looked at Wardes for help.

“All my magic’s used on the ship. We can only do what they say.” Wardes answered calmly.

The captain mouthed, “There goes my fortune,” and gave the order.

“Wrap sails. Stop the ship.”

Louise, seeing the black ship fire a shot, closing in on them, and their ship stopping, held close to Saito, who only uneasily watched the black ship.

“We are pirates! Do not resist!” a man onboard the black ship yelled with a horn.

“Pirates?” Louise was shocked.

On the black ship’s port, men lined up with bows and rifles. They aimed and shot hooked lines, grabbing onto their ship’s starboard. More strong men, about

ten of them wielding axes and curved sabers, slid over the ropes and onto the ship.

Saito held his sword, but his wrist still hurt from the previous night's battle, and he couldn't use his strength.

"Saito..." Louise said silently. He heard her, and tried to hold onto his sword harder. The marks on the back of his left hand glowed. However, Wardes, who somehow appeared behind him, put his hand on his shoulder.

"They're not just armed barbarians, Saito. They have a lot of cannons pointed at us. If you want to live on the battlefield, you've got to accurately measure their strength and yours. They might even have mages on their side."

Wardes' griffin, which was sitting on front of the deck, was also frightened of the pirates and growled. Its head was then covered with blue-white smoke, and it fell onto the deck, fast asleep.

"A sleeping spell... so they do have mages."

At an order, the pirates landed on their ship. One of them was dressed quite exquisitely. He wore a shirt that looked like it used to be white, but was dirtied black from sweat and lubricant. One could see his strong and well-tanned chest muscles in the shirt's openings. A patch covered his left eye. This man seemed to be the pirates' leader.

"Where's the captain?" He commanded in a rough tone, looking around him.

"Me." The captain, shaking but still trying to keep composure, raised his hand.

The leader walked to him in large steps, took out his saber and rapped it at the captain's face. "What's the ship's name and what does it carry?"

"Tristainia's *Marie Galante*. The cargo is sulfur."

A gasp came from the pirates. The leader sniggered, picking up the captain's hat and putting it on his head.

"I'm buying everything on this ship then... the price being your lives!"

The captain shook in shame. Then, the leader noticed Louise and Wardes standing on deck.

“Oho, we have noble guests!” The leader approached Louise and raised her chin with his hand. “We have a beauty here. Would you like to be our dishwasher?”

The men made rough, low laughs. Louise slapped his hand, and glared at him like she was about to explode into flames. “Get off me, you low-life!”

“Oh, she called us low-lives! I’m so scared now!” The men laughed loudly.

Saito wanted to take out his sword, but Wardes stopped him, whispering, “Hey, familiar. You look like you just can’t quiet down.”

“B-but... Louise...”

“What’s the use in raising a racket now? Their cannons and arrows would just rip Louise, you, and all of us apart.”

Saito was shocked.

“Don’t you care about Louise’s safety one bit?”

Saito sank in despair and remorse. *I’m useless. I can’t ever match up with this guy. Louise... will be better off marrying with this guy.* He thought.

“Alright, boys, take them all away. We can get a hell lot of ransom for this!”

Chapter Seven: The Prince of a Dying Country

Saito was caught and imprisoned by the pirates. It seemed like the Marie Galante's crew had helped to take over the ship.

Since Saito's sword and Wardes and Louise's wands had been taken, they were allowed to keep their hands and feet unrestrained. Without their wands, mages, just like the weaponless Saito, were harmless. Though the same could not be said about Louise.

In the background, one could see wine barrels, cereal sacks and gunpowder casks disorderly thrown around. Heavy cannonballs were piled up in the corner of the room.

Wardes explored the cargo with a great interest.

Saito sat down in the corner of the hold, frowning because of the pain in his injured arm.

Louise looked at Saito with a worried expression after seeing him in such a state.

"...What? Just as I thought, the injury hurts after all."

"It's nothing." Saito said snappishly.

"It's not nothing - show me!" Louise forcefully gripped Saito's arm and tucked up clothes.

"Kya"

It looked really awful. The Masked Man's lightning spell had inflicted a severe injury going from shoulder to wrist on his left arm. More so it seemed to be getting worse; his shoulder was having awful convulsions.

"Is that not awfully burnt?! Should I feel relieved now?!" Louise shouted. She

stood up and started knocking on the door

"Somebody! Somebody come!"

The guardian stood up.

"Eh?"

"Water! Is there a mage? We need a water mage! There is an injured person! He needs to be healed!"

"There is no such person."

"Lies! It is so!"

Wardes, who was taken aback, watched Louise’ dumbfounded. Saito gripped Louise's shoulder.

"Be obedient. You are the prisoner here."

"No! I won't, you are injured!"

"Stop saying that!" Saito shouted. Louise cringed because of his threatening attitude, and her pupils started getting moist. However, she gulped down her saliva and tried to fight back the incoming tears.

"D-don't cry."

"I am not crying. There is no master who would cry in front of her familiar!"

Saito turned his face away.

"I see."

"I would never cry in front of you."

Louise walked towards the other wall and sat down facing away from Saito, her body shivering. Saito headed towards Wardes and tapped his shoulder.

"Please comfort her"

"Why?"

"Aren't you Louise's fiancé?"

Wardes nodded and turned towards Louise, and hugged her shoulders from behind, comforting her. Saito collapsed on the ground, averting his eyes from Wardes and Louise. The pain in his arm kept on getting worse. It was his own fault for stopping Louise from helping him.

It's a suitable punishment for such a worthless being like me.

"My punishment... doesn't hurt that much. Uwaa-"

His muttering was interrupted by the door opening as a fat man with a plate of soup entered.

"Rice."

When Saito, who was near the door, tried to take the plate of soup. The man suddenly lifted the plate up.

"Only after you have answered a few questions."

Louise, whose eyes looked puffy, stood up.

"Ask."

"What business do you have in Albion?"

"Travelling." Louise said with a decisive voice, putting her hand on the waist.

"Tristain's noble, why would you travel to Albion? Why would you be sightseeing in such place?"

"I do not have to tell you such things."

"Still pretending to be tough, despite being scared and crying?"

Louise turned her face away as the pirate started laughing. She grabbed a plate with soup and water to throw at him, but...

Saito took it from her.

"Hey!"

"I cannot eat a soup made by such people!"

Louise turned her face away again.

"It's not healthy to stay hungry."

When Wardes said so, Louise took the plate of soup with a pouting face.

Three people ate the same soup from one plate, though in normal circumstances that would never happen.

Wardes leaned onto the wall with a tired expression on his face.

Louise tore up the sleeve of her shirt and soaked it in water, trying to cool down Saito's wound with it.

"It's alright."

"It's not alright!" Louise stared firmly at Saito with her puffy eyes. "Because, you are my familiar, you have to listen what I tell you!"

Saito averted his face. Louise, who was treating his arm softly, looked up at him.

"What is it?"

"You have more important duties to care about."

"I do, but an injury is also very important! Is that clear?!"

Saito kept on looking away, before noticing the barrels with gunpowder.

"We could escape by using that."

"Eh?"

Louise suspiciously followed Saito's look. Saito opened the barrel and filled the plate with gunpowder.

Wardes muttered tiredly.

"And where would you run? Only emptiness surrounds us."

Saito sat down again with a thump.

"...but, sitting like that and doing nothing..."

At that time, the door opened again. This time it was a thin pirate standing before them. The pirate looked at the three with piercing eyes and asked.

"Good evening, are you the aristocrats going to Albion?"

Louise did not answer.

"Oi oi, judging from your silence it's true. Although we do not look like that we respect nobles, thanks to the aristocrats our business goes well."

"But, isn't this a warship of rebels?"

"No no, though we are employed, we are involved in the fifty-fifty relationship with both sides. We are related to both factions. So how is it? Are you nobles? If it is true, then you will be let go free in the closest port."

Saito felt relieved. Since Louise was an aristocrat everything could be settled peacefully then. Also, they would be taken to the closest port.

Louise, however, did not nod her head in agreement and kept on glaring at the pirate's forehead instead.

"How dare you have anything to do with those dirty rebels? Do not disregard Albion nobles. I myself am one of the noble families. Albion is still a kingdom, as the royal family is still a legitimate government in Albion. Because I am an aristocrat who comes here on behalf of Tristain, I am, in other words, an ambassador. Therefore, I demand an ambassador's treatment from you."

Saito widely opened his mouth and muttered. "Are you an idiot?"

"Who are you calling an idiot? The idiot is you! Trying to act cool while being injured this badly!" Louise angrily turned to Saito and shouted.

"But! You should choose the time and place for your straightforwardness better!"

"Shut up! You are my familiar and you should listen to what I say! Anyway, show your arm! Hey!"

The surprised Saito clasped his arm, while Louise tried to pull Saito's arm with a jerk.

The pirate laughed after seeing such scene.

"Honestly, you should stop doing that!"

"You're wrong, I can't let you get hurt so carelessly." Louise asserted.

"Eh?" Saito said in a surprised voice.

"It's because you are my familiar... t-that's why..."

"I'll go to report to the Boss then."

The pirate left laughing.

Saito was so surprised that he wasn't able to reply to Louise properly.

"Arm, show it."

"Don't act this way. Aren't there more things to be concerned of? Like our present situation."

Louise responded decisively "I won't let such things take me down as long as we have the slightest chance to survive."

Louise stood up straight. Though the thought of marrying Wardes made her feel funny at the start, it wasn't so strong anymore.

"...In any case, you lied to them."

"Don't talk nonsense. Are you seriously thinking that lying to such people is a bad thing?"

Saito sighed tiredly. Wardes came near Louise and tapped her shoulder.

"Don't say such things Louise, you are still my bride."

Saito looked away dejectedly. Louise's face showed mixed feelings as she looked down.

The door opened again, it was the same thin pirate.

"The boss calls."

The aisle passed up the narrow stairs and took the three to a splendid room built on the upper part of the deck.

The Boss... apparently, the chief of the pirates, was there.

As the door opened, one could see a gorgeous dinner table and a pirate sitting at its end, playing with a cane that had big crystal attached on top of it. Seemingly, he was a mage himself. The Boss' room was very different from what one would expect from a pirate.

He looked intensively at Louise who entered the room. The thin pirate who had brought her there poked her slightly from behind.

"Hey, you, you are standing in front of the Boss, so greet him properly."

However, Louise just stood there glaring at the Boss as he smiled at her.

"Ah, I like a strong willed woman, you are not a child at all."

"I demand the treatment of an ambassador."

Louise, not paying attention to the Boss' words, repeated her demand.

"And what would be that message you are trying to give?"

Asked the Boss as he ignored Louise's words.

"And did you say royal?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why are you going there? They will be gone tomorrow."

"I won't tell you."

But the Boss spoke to Louise in a joyful voice.

"Are you willing to betray the nobles? Otherwise, even if you are a mage I might not guarantee your safety even for considerable fee."

"I'd rather die."

Saito poked Louise, and at that moment he noticed her body trembling. She was scared. But even if she was scared, she kept on looking straight into the eyes of the Boss.

Saito remembered his duel with Guiche.

I was scared at that time. I thought I was going to die. But I didn't bow my head down. I think that Louise today resembles me at that time. She stands against a scary opponent but is able to withstand it because she has something important in her mind, just like me.

This Louise looked really amazing.

"I'll ask you again. Are you willing to betray the nobles?"

Louise looked straight ahead. She crossed her arms, and put out her chest.

However, Saito interrupted her before she could open her mouth.

"She told you her answer already."

"And who are you?"

The Boss looked at Saito with a piercing glare. The eyes that seemed to see the deep secrets. But Saito looked straight at the Boss, just like Louise did.

"A familiar."

"Familiar?"

"Seems so."

The Boss started laughing. He laughed loudly.

"I knew that Tristainan nobles were weird but not so helplessly. Oh my, my stomach hurts." Said the Boss as he stood up laughing. Saito and the others were puzzled by the sudden change of atmosphere and looked at each other.

"Oh, I am sorry. As a noble I should properly introduce myself as well."

The pirate who was laughing loudly suddenly stood up straight.

He removed his black curly hair from his head. It seemed to be a wig. He also took off the black eye patch, and also removed his fake beard. Before them now was standing a young person with blond hair.

"I am a general of the Albion Royal Air Force and also the commander of our country fleet. Though to tell the truth this warship named "Eagle" is the only ship in our fleet. A powerless fleet. Oh dear, even people from the street could easily beat it."

The young person bowed while introducing himself.

"I am the prince of the Albion's Kingdom, Wales Tudor."

Louise's mouth opened wide and Saito couldn't take his eyes from the surprising appearance of the young prince of Albion. Wardes watched the prince with great interest.

Wales smiled with a charming smile and moved a chair for Louise to sit.

"Welcome to Albion, Ambassador. Now, let’s talk about your message."

However, Louise was still speechless. She just stood there dumbfounded, unable to move.

"Why do I dress up as a pirate? To hide myself? No, the rich rebels sent a lot of

support to the rebellion, and it is a basic war tactic to cut enemy's supply line. It was necessary so I had to dress myself like an undignified dirty pirate."

Wales said laughingly.

"No, it was really impolite to treat an ambassador like that. But you have to admit you don't look much like a royal messenger yourself. And I never thought about support from other country's nobles. Yet I still should apologize."

Even after Wales' words, Louise's mouth still kept opening and closing without uttering a single sound. She hadn't been mentally prepared to meet the prince so suddenly.

"We brought a secret letter from Her Highness Princess Henrietta." Wardes said while gracefully bowing.

"Ohh, from Her Highness. And you are?"

"Captain of Tristain's Griffin Knights, Viscount Wardes."

After that, Wardes introduced Louise to Wales.

"And this is the ambassador sent by Her Highness from the Vallière family and her familiar, Your Highness."

"Indeed! Such a splendid noble. And I only have my ten bodyguards to greet you, such a miserable greeting. Then, do you still have the secret letter?"

Louise panicking took out Henrietta's letter from her clothes.

However, she stopped before giving it to Wales. After a few moments of hesitation she opened her mouth.

"B-but..."

"What?"

"Excuse me, but are you really a prince?"

Wales laughed.

"Oh dear, you won't believe me even if I showed you my true face. I am Wales. And I am really a prince. I will show evidence then."

Wales said after seeing the water ruby ring shining on Louise's finger.

Louise's hand was taken and the ring that shone on a finger was removed. The prince brought it close to his ruby ring. The two rings reacted to each other, shining with a bright light.

"This ring belongs to the Albion royal family, the ruby of the Wind, while that one belongs to Henrietta from Tristain royal family and is the ruby of the Water. Am I right?"

Louise nodded.

"Water and the wind make the rainbow. A rainbow which is formed between royal families."

"True, I am sorry for my impoliteness."

Louise handed Wales the letter and bowed.

After looking at the letter lovingly, Wales kissed the signature. Then, the seal was carefully removed, the paper inside was taken out, and Wales began to read.

For some time he kept on reading it with serious expression.

"Is the princess marrying? That beautiful Henrietta. My beloved... cousin."

Wardes bowed silently, with an affirmative expression. Wales dropped the glance to the letter again and smiled when the last line was read.

"Understood. The princess is informing me with this that she wants you to return that letter. And more importantly, the princess also hopes that I return a letter from her. Seems like it."

Louise's face beamed with pleasure.

"However, it's not in my hands right now. It's in the castle in Newcastle. I didn't want to bring the princess' letter to this pirate ship." Wales said laughingly.

"So, even though it's troublesome, please come with me to Newcastle."

Chapter Eight: The Eve Before the Final Battle in Newcastle

The warship *Eagle* took Saito to the ragged coastline of Albion. They had been traveling for three hours and could already see the cape, a big castle standing on its very edge.

Wales explained to Saito, who was standing on the front deck, that it was the fortress of Newcastle. However, the *Eagle* did not head straight to the city, but instead sailed down the coast.

"Why are we going downwards?"

Wales pointed at the sky behind the castle where a huge ship was floating. However, it could not see the *Eagle*, which was hiding on the other side of the cloud.

"Warship of rebels."

It could be described only as a huge ship - it was twice as long as the *Eagle* with an incredible number of sails, and it seemed like it was aiming for Newcastle port. With no warning it opened fire aiming at the castle. The first cannonball crashed into the wall and a small fire could be seen. The shockwave from impact could be felt on the deck of the *Eagle*.

"This ship named "*Royal Sovereign*" once belonged to the fleet of our country. Yet, when rebels took control over it, they changed the name to "*Lexington*". It was named in honor of the battlefield where those guys snatched the first victory from us." Wales said with a smile.

"This warship keeps a constant blockade of Newcastle from the sky. It shoots at the castle from time to time, not in order to do some damage, but just to annoy us."

Saito looked through the cloud at the warship. There were a lot of cannons on each side, and a dragon was painted on the surface of the ship.

"It has 108 cannons and really looks like a fire breathing dragon at times. The whole rebellion started from this ship. We can't match it, so it's better to sail through this cloud and remain unseen. We can reach Newcastle from the other side, as there is a secret port that only we know."

It suddenly became pitch-dark when the ship went under the continent, as the landmass blocked the sunlight. In addition, they were still surrounded by clouds. They couldn't see a thing. Wales explained that rebels never went under the continent because traveling in such a way was dangerous. Cold, damp and chilly air hit Saito's cheeks.

"For Navigators of the royal air force it's easy to navigate by relying on topographical maps, using magic of light and measurements."

Wales laughed, the noble that does not know the sky is not an intelligent person.

They sailed for a while and eventually reached a section which opened into black hole overhead. Illuminated by the magic light from the mast, it was really spectacular, they could see a hole 300 mails in diameter.

"Stop here for now."

"Aye Aye sir, stop here!"

Wales' order was given to the still very energetic and lively crew. The sails were taken off and the *Eagle* started to drift right under the hole.

"Slowly increase speed."

"Aye Aye sir, slowly increase the speed!"

The *Eagle* rose slowly toward the hole. Following just behind was the *Marie Galante* that navigators of the *Eagle* had boarded.

Wardes nodded, "You are definitely not sky pirates, Your Highness."

"We are precisely sky pirates, Viscount."

Light could be seen inside the hole and that's where the *Eagle* headed to.

The warship had arrived at a secret port of Newcastle. Inside, the huge limestone cave was covered with white moss. Many people were waiting on the quay. Ropes were thrown to the sailors to tie down the *Eagle* and finally the wooden gangway was attached.

Wales hurried Louise and the others to go down the gangway.

A tall and aged mage approached them.

"Ha ha, wonderful military results, right, Your Highness?"

The old mage seemed to appear out of nowhere before the *Eagle*.

"Rejoice, Paris. Sulfur, it is sulfur!"

When Wales shouted so, around him gathered cheering soldiers.

"Ooh! Sulfur! This is for the honor of our guardianship!" The old mage began to cry as he was aging.

"I served for sixty years under the previous king... There won't be such happy days again, Your Highness. After the revolt happened it all turned into sorrow... Even with sulfur we won't make it..."

Wales laughed with a smile.

"Even if we'll be defeated, we'll show the revolters the royal family's courage and honor."

"A glorious death. My old bones are trembling with excitement. It was reported

that the rebels are going to attack the castle tomorrow. It's really all or nothing now, Your Highness."

"With our last breath we'll put their soldiers to shame!"

Wales and the others were laughing at ease from the bottoms of their hearts. Louise became worried after hearing the word defeat. *In other words, they will die. Aren't these people scared of death?*

"And who are these people?" The old mage named Paris asked Wales after seeing Louise.

"This is an ambassador from Tristain. She came because of an important business related to the kingdom."

Paris was surprised for a moment, what would the ambassador from another kingdom be searching for in those ruins?But soon a smile returned to his face.

"So you are an ambassador. Paris Chamberlain at your service, madam. It's nice that you came all the way to Albion. Though it might not be much, we will have a small feast tonight. By all means - please come."

Louise and the others followed Wales to his room. The prince's room was situated behind the kitchen room and it was rather ordinary looking.

There was a wooden bed, table and a pair of chairs, as well as a painting on the wall that illustrated a battle scene.

The prince sat on the chair and opened a drawer of the desk, inside of which was a little jewelry box. The prince took the necklace off his neck.

A small key was put into the lock of the little box and Wales opened it. Henrietta's portrait was lying in there.

Wales, who had noticed Louise looking at the box, spoke embarrassedly.

"Strongbox."

There was one letter inside. It seemed to be from the princess too. Wales took it out with love and read it. That letter looked older than it should from being constantly re-read.

After reading it Wales gently folded it and put it into an envelope, then he handed it to Louise.

"This is the letter I got from the princess. I am returning it as well."

"Thank you."

Louise received the letter while bowing deeply.

"The Eagle will take you back to Tristain tomorrow, as we won't be using it in the battle."

Louise opened her mouth decisively after looking for some time at the letter.

"But, Your Highness... What did you have in mind when you mentioned a glorious defeat?"

Louise asked with hesitation. Wales answered it very easily.

"It is so. My army has 300 men while the enemy force has 50000. There is no chance of victory. So let us at least die in glory."

Louise looked down.

"Your Highness, do you also mean yourself when you talk about dying in battle?"

"Of course. I will die as well."

Saito, who had been looking at the conversation from the side, sighed. The prince being worried so little by death tomorrow made it all so confusing. It seemed that it was not reality but an event from a play.

Louise's shoulders dropped when she bowed deeply to Wales. She had more things to say though.

"Your Highness... Forgive my impoliteness, but there are a few more things I have to say."

"What do you want to say?"

"What is the content of the letter?"

"Louise."

Saito protested. Indeed, the content of the letter was a personal thing after all. But Louise, after asking Wales, looked up with determination.

"When princess-sama gave me this task she looked like she was worrying about her lover. And in the box there was a portrait of princess-sama, and seeing the gloomy face after you kissed and read the letter... Are you and the princess-sama..."

Wales smiled. He guessed what Louise wanted to ask.

"Do you want to ask if cousin Henrietta and I have a love relationship?"

Louise nodded.

"It seems so. Forgive my surprising impoliteness. In that case, the content of this letter is..."

After putting his hand to his forehead and making a gesture, as if worried for a moment about what he should and shouldn't say, Wales spoke.

"A love letter. Just like you guessed. Foolishly, if this love letter were to be passed to the imperial household of Germania as Henrietta informed by letter, it might become a great threat. In the letter she is swearing eternal love for me in the name of Founder Brimir. It is like an oath when marrying, love sworn in the name of the founder. If this letter is brought to light, she will be accused of committing the crime of bigamy. The emperor of Germania is sure to break off the engagement with the princess who violated the rules. Then, there would be no alliance. Tristain might be politically ignored by other countries' noble

families."

"So princess-sama and Your Highness were in love with each other?"

"It's an old story."

Louise spoke to Wales in a feverish tone. "Your Highness, return! Return to Tristain!"

Wardes abruptly put his hand on her shoulder. However, this did not stop Louise.

"I beg you! Please, come to Tristain with us!"

"It cannot be done." Wales said with a laugh.

"Your Highness, I disagree. Princess-sama would think so as well! Didn't it say so in the letter? I have known princess-sama since our childhood, I know very well how she thinks. Princess-sama does not desert the people she loves! Your Highness, you didn't say it, but I am sure princess-sama told you to run away as well!"

Wales shook his head. "There is not such line written."

"Your Highness!" Louise kept on pressing Wales.

"I am from a royal family. I am not lying. There is nothing in the letter from the princess telling me to run away. I swear it by my honor."

Wales spoke as if he was in pain. It seemed like Louise's words hit him.

"Henrietta is a princess. She has to give priority to the country rather than me."

Louise understood what he meant with that. Even if Wales liked Henrietta, it would never be supported by other nobles in his situation.

Wales tapped Louise's shoulder.

"You are an honest girl, Vallière. You have honest, clear and kind eyes."

Louise looked down desolately.

"But let me give you some advice. It's not too good for an ambassador to be honest like that."

Wales smiled with an attractive smile.

"However, you are a perfect ambassador to a ruined country like ours, as the government that will be destroyed tomorrow is more honest than anyone, since it doesn't have anything to defend besides its honor."

After that he pulled something out of his pocket. From the shape and running arrow it seemed to be a clock.

"Ahhaha, it is time for our little party. Since you are the last guests of our kingdom, I would like you to attend it as well."

Saito and Louise went out of the room. Wardes stayed behind and bowed to Wales.

"Oh do you have some more business, Viscount?"

"There is one favor I would like to ask, Milord."

"Ask."

Wardes whispered into the ear of Wales, who smiled.

"Ah such a lovely request, it will be my pleasure."

The party was held in the castle's hall. The king of Albion, James I, sat on the throne, and watched the nobles and vassals who had gathered through narrowed eyes.

Though the following day everyone would die, it was still quite a feast and the table was filled with various treats.

Saito and the others were watching this colorful party while standing in the corner of the hall.

"They put all the troubles of tomorrow behind and are trying to enjoy the present."

Wardes nodded in response to Saito's words.

"Yes, they behave joyfully."

When Prince Wales showed up, there were some enthusiastic sighs between the ladies. It seemed like he was popular not only as a prince but as a handsome man as well. When he approached the throne, people started whispering.

James I tried to stand up straight and greet him, but because of his old age he staggered and almost fell down.

Some laughter could be heard from the hall.

"Your Majesty! It's too early to fall!"

"Indeed! Save that for tomorrow!"

James I wasn't insulted by such comments, and smiled.

"Don't worry, it's just my legs were numb from sitting for so long."

Wales came closer and supported the king's body with his. There were a few more chuckles.

"You. I will tell all of you brave and loyal vassals, that tomorrow 'Reconquista' is planning to attack our Newcastle with their full force. You followed and fought bravely for this incapable old king, however tomorrow won't be a battle. It is likely to be a one-sided slaughter. Let's endure it and show our bravery for one last time."

The king coughed loudly, after that he continued talking.

"But it might be asking too much for all you to die. Thus tomorrow morning the warship Eagle will take all women and children and the ones who chose to leave to a safer place further from this forsaken continent."

However, no one answered. One noble loudly informed the king.

"You Majesty! We are waiting for the order! Whole Army Forward! Whole Army Forward! Whole Army Forward! Since our hearing is so bad tonight I doubt we will be able to hear any other orders!"

All the people nodded.

"Yeah! What would others say if we were to run away?"

"It's too late to retreat, Your Majesty"

"It's alright! We will continue to serve the king like we did years before! Tonight is a good night! The founder has blessed us with a wonderful moon and warm night! Let's enjoy drinking and dancing for tonight!"

With this everyone returned to the feast. The three guests from Tristain attracted a lot of attention. The nobles didn't seem to be sad or worried, they playfully kept on joking and offering wine or food to the guests.

"Ambassador! Try this wine! Tell us which country's wine is better!"

"Here! Try this! It's Albion's special - chicken with honey, will make you healthy and strong for sure!"

Albion kept on having fun! Even in the end.

Saito became melancholic. The people who acted joyfully at the face of death looked more sad than brave. Louise seemed to have felt it more. She couldn't endure the atmosphere, shook her head and ran out of the hall.

For a moment Saito wanted to follow her, but urged Wardes to go instead.

Wardes nodded and went after her. Saito crouched on the floor and sighed.

Wales saw Saito acting this way and came to him from the center of the hall.

"This boy is Miss Vallière's familiar. However, it is very unusual for a person to be a familiar. Tristain is really an unusual country."

Wales laughed while saying so.

"It is unusual in Tristain as well." Said Saito tiredly.

"Feeling down?"

Anxiously, Wales looked into Saito's face. He still felt pain in his arm and seeing people preparing for their death was depressing as well.

Saito stood up and asked Wales. "Sorry for the impoliteness... But aren't you scared?"

"Scared?" Wales looked blankly at Saito.

"Aren't you scared to die?"

Wales laughed after hearing Saito's words.

"You are worried about us! Us! What a nice boy you are!"

"No, it's just that it is scary for me. I could not laugh the way you do if I were to know that I would die tomorrow."

"I am scared. There is no person who would not be scared to die. It doesn't matter if you are a noble or commoner."

"Then why?"

"It is because I have something to defend. Something that makes me forget the coldness of the grave."

"What do you defend? Honor? Fame? Those are foolish things to die for." Saito said with louder voice.

Wales answered with distant eyes.

"The aristocrat faction 'Reconquista' is our enemy that tries to unite Halkeginia. It hangs to the 'Holy Land' ideal. It's good that people have such ideals, but it shouldn't be brought about with force and blood. All countries would be ruined."

"However, is there no chance of victory any more? What's the point of dying here? Maybe you can find other means to defeat them later..."

"No, we should at least show off a glimpse of courage and honor to other nobles even if is not possible to win. We can show that Halkeginia's royal families are

not a weak enemy, even though the other side does not seem like they will throw away the ambitions of 'Union' and 'Recovery of the Holy Land' anytime soon."

"Why?" Saito asked.

Saito who grew up in modern Japan could not understand why one would show one's courage in such way.

Wales declared decisively.

"Why? Simply, it is our obligation. The obligation of those born in the royal family. The obligation imposed on the royal family to defend the kingdom to the very end."

Saito did not understand. Wales has a person whom he loves, and who loves Wales as well; isn't surviving for that person also an obligation? He thought in such a way.

"The princess of Tristain loves you. Did you forgot her letter?"

After Saito said that, Wales smiled as he remembered it.

"Because of love, sometimes it is necessary to pretend not to know. Because of love, sometimes it is necessary to let go. It would only give others an excuse to invade Tristain."

"But, but..."

Saito hesitated. Wales's decision won't be changed. Wales gripped Saito's shoulder and looked straight into his eyes.

"Since it is cleared, don't tell this to Henrietta. No need to worry her pretty face with unnecessary worries. She is like a pretty flower. Don't you think so too?"

Saito nodded. *She indeed is a beautiful princess. I don't want to see her face sad or worried either.*

But, Wales wouldn't change his decision because of that. That's what Wales' eyes said.

"Just tell her that Wales fought bravely and died bravely. That will be enough."

Wales returned to the center of the hall after saying that.

Saito left the feast, but since he felt lost, he asked the waiter where his room was.

After he was told, someone tapped his shoulder from behind. Saito saw Wardes when he turned around.

"I have to tell you something."

Wardes said in a stony voice.

"And that would be?"

"Louise and I will hold a wedding here tomorrow."

Saito's body froze. He wasn't able to understand the meaning of the words.

"A-at such time? Why?"

"Because we want to ask the brave Crown Prince Wales to act as go-between of our marriage. The Crown Prince pleasantly agreed. We will hold a ceremony before the decisive battle."

Saito became silent, and nodded.

"Will you come?" Wardes asked.

Saito shook his head.

"Then you can leave with the ship tomorrow. Louise and I will return with a griffon."

"But isn't it too long of a distance?"

Saito, because he was confused, asked rather a trivial question.

"Only if you fly fast without resting." Wardes answered. "Well then, I need to go now."

"A-alright."

Saito's shoulders dropped.

Though he knew that this would come eventually, he still felt very lonely.

Saito was walking through a pitch-dark passage with a candlestick. The moon was shining through an open window on the way of the passage.

There was a girl who walked alone in the moonlight. She had long blond-pink hair... Tears that looked like pearls were falling down her white cheek. Saito looked quietly admiring her for a while, such a beautiful but sad face.

Louise turned around and noticed Saito, who was standing there with a candle. Her eyes were wet even though she had wiped them.

Her face became sad once again. When Saito walked up to her, she leaned into his body, as if losing all her strength.

"You are crying, why..."

Louise didn't answer, but pressed her face into Saito's chest.

He embraced her firmly.

Saito, at first, was puzzled by Louise clinging to him. He wasn't used to these kinds of things. However, she sobbed like a girl, and it felt like Louise clung to him very dearly. She was hurt and he felt sorry for her. However, what does this mean?

Louise probably clung to me because I was here by chance- like a girl clinging to a stuffed animal. It is not me but Wardes that is really important to her.

Still, Saito said nothing and patted Louise's head in an awkward way with his hand. Her head seemed so small that it fit in his palm.

Louise spoke while crying.

"No... Those people... Why, why did they chose to die? Even though there is the princess... Even if Wales loves her... Why does Crown Prince Wales choose death?"

"He said that it was to defend something important."

"What is more important in this world than the person you love?"

"I don't understand the prince's way of thinking either."

"I will persuade him! I will persuade him again!"

"Don't."

"Why?"

"Because you are here to deliver princess-sama's letter. That is your only mission."

Louise muttered while tears kept on streaming down her cheeks. "...I want to return soon. I want to return back to Tristain. I dislike this country. These foolish people and this unreasonable prince that leaves everything."

Though Louise sometimes acted tough, she was still a girl. Louise could not understand Wales' world. But Saito understood her as he thought the same way as well.

Louise, as if suddenly remembering, took something out of her pocket.

"Put out your left arm." Louise said.

"What?"

"Just do it."

Saito presented his left arm as he was told. It was a can that Louise took out. She scooped inside with her finger and took some sticky medicine that had a funny smell to it.

"I got it from someone in the castle a little while ago. This magical water medicine is very effective against burns. I could get only this medicine but it should be alright."

Louise muttered while she was lubricating Saito's arm with it.

I never thought she could be so gentle. But I should not become dependent on this gentleness too much, as it will be gone soon.

Saito shook his head and pushed Louise away from him. Louise looked up at his face surprised.

Saito had a painful expression on his face.

After seeing such an expression on his face, Louise bit her lip.

"...Why such a face? Did something happen?"

"It's nothing."

"I understand. As soon as we return, I will search for a way to send you back to your world."

Louise said while hesitating. Apparently, she misunderstood. However, Saito thought it was good to let it be this way.

"...It's alright even if you don't help."

"What?"

"I mean, you will marry soon, so you shouldn't bother about searching for a way to send me back."

"What? Don't tell me you are worrying about that? You're still thinking about words I said in the La Rochelle hotel? Indeed, I said 'marry' at that time... But, but I wasn't serious about it."

Louise turned her face away from Saito.

"It is not possible to marry yet. I am still not a splendid mage... And I haven't found a way to send you back either..."

Saito thought.

Indeed, Louise might not marry because she feels responsible for me. And because of that she won't be able to marry until I find my way home. Saito thought it would be bad for Louise. *I do not think this is fair for this dazzling, beautiful, nice and gentle Louise.*

"It's alright. I will look for the way to return alone, so you should marry."

"What a selfish thing to say, you are my familiar! Defend me until we can find a way to send you back!"

Louise said and intensely stared at Saito.

"I cannot defend you."

Saito's shoulders dropped down lonely when he said it.

"Remember what happened."

The spectacle of the travel revived in Saito's head. When they started shooting the arrows, he was saved by Wardes. He was defeated in the duel with Wardes. When they were attacked by the man in the white mask, he could not save Louise.

It is always Wardes saving you. I was not able to do a thing but stand and watch.

"I am not a strong mage like the Viscount. I am just a normal person, even if they say I am the legendary familiar 'Gandálfr'. I don't know how to fight. All I can do is just swing a sword around recklessly. I can't protect you."

Louise's palm struck Saito's cheek.

"Coward!"

Saito spoke without changing his expression.

"Let's separate from here on Louise. You return with the viscount by griffon while I return with the Eagle. When I get back, I'll look for the way to return to my world. As things are, I am indebted to you already."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Idiot!"

Louise shouted. Tears started running from her eyes again. Still, Saito didn't answer. He just watched Louise tremble.

"I hate you! I hate you!"

Saito muttered while veiling his eyes. "I know."

Louise turned on her heels and ran down the dark passage. Saito patted his cheek. The place where it was hit still ached and made him feel very sad.

"Good-bye, Louise."

Saito said in a small voice. Though he thought that he would not cry, tears were streaming down and did not stop.

"Good-bye, my gentle and lovely master."

Chapter Nine: The Final Battle

The next morning…

Within Newcastle's port inside the cave, Saito stood in a queue to board the Eagle, surrounded by rushing people that were not able to leave with Marie Galante.

“Because of love, sometimes it is necessary to let go...” Derflinger muttered silently. He was hanging by a string on Saito's back. It was unbearable, during days like these, to have no one to talk to.

“Stop saying it…”

“Why?”

“I feel sick when you say it.”

“You mean ‘Because of love, sometimes it is necessary to let go’…That?”

“Why don’t you stop saying that?”

“I understand. If my partner is asking, I won’t say it anymore. Yet, we have to discuss a few things about our future. Have you decided where to go, since we have lots of free time now?” Derflinger asked, pretending not to know.

“Maybe to Arukattsu.”

“And there we will look for the way to return to partner’s former world?”

“Why would you be looking for it? I’m the only one who is an alien here, right?” Saito said.

A way to return home? Louise said she’ll help search for it, but he shouldn't rely on that. Even though leaving Louise's city was something hard to do.

“Then you should become a mercenary.”

“Mercenary?”

“Yes. With a sword on your shoulder, at one battlefield today, and then wandering to another country and battlefield tomorrow. Poor income, but at least your rage would be satisfied, right?”

Saito muttered.

“And with a bad teammate.”

“What, without me as a partner, an ordinary guy like you would be left behind instantly.”

“Even if your greatest power is rusting.”

“How rude. But I forgive you, since you are my partner. By the way, partner, I recalled one thing the other day…”

“What?”

“Partner, you are called Gandálfr?

“Aah, because that’s the name of the legendary familiar. When I first heard it, I was amazed. I-“

“Wait. Wait just a moment, partner. I think I remember the name…”

“Really?”

“No, it is an extremely old memory… It was very long ago, I just caught it in a corner of my head…”

Derflinger kept on muttering “hm” ,“aha”, and “aah” repeatedly.

“Maybe you are confused since it was a long time ago. Besides, where is the head of a sword anyway?”

Derflinger thought about it for a while.

“The handle, maybe?” He said, making Saito laugh.

It was finally Saito’s time to board the ship. When he rose up the gangway, he saw that the refugee ship was everything one could expect it to be – many people squeezed next to each other so that it wasn’t possible to find a place to sit on the deck.

Saito looked at the limestone cave from the edge of the gunwale. At that moment, Louise was in the middle of her wedding. Saito shut his eyes tightly at that lonesome thought.

People still kept boarding the ship one after another. It was really overcrowded and a mass of people pushed Saito around the deck. Someone’s elbow hit against his injured arm, making Saito scream.

Meanwhile, in a chapel, where the Founder Brimir's portrait hung, Crown Prince Wales was waiting for the bridegroom and the bride to appear. There were no other people around, as everybody was busy preparing for the upcoming battle. Wales also had planned, once the ceremony was over, to prepare for the battle as well.

Wales was dressed in the Crown Prince’s formal uniform. He wore a bright purple mantle, the symbol of the royal family, and a hat with seven colored wings, the symbol of Albion's royal family.

The door opened, Louise and Wardes had arrived. Louise stood with a dazzled expression on her face, so Wales had to urge her to come and stand in front of him.

Louise was puzzled. Everything happened so suddenly. Wardes barged into her room this morning and brought her here, without even waking her up properly. She was puzzled, because desperate feelings were swelling in her mind. She came here without thinking, still half-asleep. Because of the prince who was determined to die and Saito’s attitude yesterday, she was very depressed.

Wardes, after telling Louise that it was “Time to do the wedding now”, put on a

bridal veil borrowed from Albion's royal family on Louise’s head. The veil was nicely made, and the flowers, that were eternally fresh due to magic, made it look indescribably beautiful.

Then, Wardes removed Louise’s black mantle and replaced it with a white one, that was also borrowed from Albion's royal family. Only brides were allowed to wear it, as it was the mantle of a virgin.

However, even while being dressed up by Wardes' hands, Louise was still unresponsive. But Wardes understood Louise's mood as a sign of her affirmative will.

Wardes and Louise stood up in front of Wales, who was standing below the image of the Founder Brimir, wearing his official uniform. Wardes, who himself was wearing his usual clothes and a magical mantle, bowed his head.

“Well then, let's start the ceremony.”

The Prince’s voice reached Louise's ears. However, it sounded like a weak sound of a distant bell. Louise’s mind was still lost in the fog of her own thoughts.

“Bridegroom, Viscount Jean-Jacques Francis de Wardes. Do you take this girl as your wife, and swear to respect and love her in the name of the Founder Brimir?”

Wardes nodded solemnly and grasped the cane with his left hand, holding it out in front of his chest.

“I swear.”

Wales looked at Louise and smiled encouragingly.

“Bride, the third daughter of the Duke of La Vallière, Louise Françoise le Blanc de La Vallière…”

Wales read the oath in a clear voice.

Just then, Louise noticed that she was in the middle of a wedding ceremony. Her partner – reliable Wardes, for whom she once yearned. A marriage arranged by their fathers. Only now was her childish, absent-minded, distant future starting to

turn into reality.

It is not like I hate Wardes. Maybe I even like him. But if it is so, why do I feel such pain? Why do I feel so sad?

Is it because I saw a kingdom turning into ruins? Or is it because I faced a prince who deserted his love and hopes, in order to die?

It's not that. Though those are sad events that hurt, there wouldn't be such a cloud of sadness hanging on my mind just because of that.

It was a deep, melancholic cloud, which was hard to bear.

Louise suddenly remembered the expression on Saito's face when she said "marriage" to him.

Why did I say such a thing to him?

It is because I wanted to be stopped.

By whom?

Because I wanted Saito to stop me.

Why?

Louise started to blush once thinking about the reason. Just like thinking about the reason why the previous night she, though in deep sorrow, so easily jumped into Saito's chest, whom she accidentally met in the corridor.

But are those feelings true ones? I don't know. But isn't it worth it to try to find out?

After all, no matter how excited or sad she had been, she never jumped into a man's chest before.

Meanwhile…

On the warship Eagle deck.

Saito, who was depressingly leaning against the edge of the gunwale, began to lose focus on everything around him.

“Mmm?”

“What is it, partner?”

Saito's view grew dim. Just like in the heat haze of midsummer, the view in his left eye started swinging.

“My eyes are acting strange.”

“It’s because you are tired.”

Derflinger said, pretending not to know the real reason.

“Bride?”

Wales looked at her direction. Louise looked up panicking.

She had the expression of a person who didn’t know what she was doing there at all. Louise was puzzled. What should she do? What should she do at times like this? No one taught her that. Only Louise’s familiar, who was leaving the ground at the moment, might know the answer.

“Are you nervous? That’s alright. It’s your first time, it is normal to be nervous.”

Wales smiled, while talking.

“Oh dear, we still have to hold to the etiquette. Doing this would have meaning only if we are to follow etiquette. Then, let me repeat. Do you take this man as your husband, and swear to respect and love him in the name of the Founder Brimir…”

Louise realized. She shouldn’t hesitate with the answer, waiting for someone to

tell her what to do.

She had to make decisions for herself.

Determined Louise took a deep, deep breath.

And, before Wales finished his words, Louise shook her head.

“Bride?”

“Louise?”

Two people suspiciously looked into Louise’s face. She looked at Wardes with a sad expression on her face and once again shook her head.

“By all means, Louise. Are you feeling poorly?”

“No, that’s not it. I am sorry…”

“If today is bad, then another time…”

“That’s not it, that’s not it. I’m sorry Wardes, I cannot marry you.”

Wales looked doubtful at the sudden change of events.

“Bride, is this marriage not what you want?”

"Yes, that’s how it is. I want to apologize to both of you, for my rudeness. It was a painful decision to make, but I do not want to marry.”

An angry red blush quickly spread on Wardes face. Wales turned to him and said in an embarrassed, doubtful and regretful voice.

"Viscount, I am terribly sorry, but the bride doesn’t wish for this ceremony to continue.”

However, Wardes didn’t pay any attention to Wales, and took Louise's hand.

“…You are just nervous. Dear Louise. You cannot be seriously refusing my offer.”

“I'm sorry, Wardes. I yearned for you. Maybe… maybe even loved you once. However, it is different now.”

Then, Wardes gripped Louise’s shoulder. The expression in his eyes changed. Gone was the usual kindness from his face, replaced with the chilly coldness of a reptile.

Wardes shouted in a feverish tone.

“The world, Louise! I will rule the world! You are necessary for that!”

Frightened by the sudden change in Wardes, Louise kept on shaking her head.

“…I, I am not needed for that.”

Wardes extended both his hands, drawing Louise closer.

“You are necessary for me! Your ability! Your power!”

This Wardes was frightening Louise more and more. Not even in her wildest dreams did she imagine the gentle Wardes frowning or shouting like this. Louise tried to turn away.

“Louise, have you forgotten what I once told you! You are not inferior to even the Founder Brimir, you will grow up as an excellent mage some day! You just do not know about it yet! That talent!”

“Wardes, you…”

Louise’s voice was trembling with fear. It was not the Wardes that Louise knew. What had changed him into such a person?

On the warship Eagle, Saito rubbed his eyes again.

“What is it, partner?”

“My left eye is really acting strange.”

“That’s because you are tired.”

However, the view of Saito's left eye was getting distorted more and more.

“Uwaa! I can see something!”

Saito shouted. That was really someone’s view.

Saito's left and right eye felt like completely separate parts.

“I can see…”

“What can you see, partner?”

“Maybe, this is Louise’s view.” Saito said.

Now he recalled what Louise said some time ago. “A familiar is the eyes and ears of its master, that’s their ability.”

However, Louise said she couldn't see anything through my eyes... It must be, there must be cases when the rules are reversed.

But why can I see Louise’s view all of sudden?

Saito looked at his left hand. The rune carved there was shining brightly, even though he wasn’t holding any weapon. Indeed, his guess must be correct.

This was his ability. Truly, it must be another ability of the legendary familiar Gandálfr.

Let’s see, I guess that’s what Louise is seeing with her left eye then? While thinking so, Saito’s natural curiosity took the lead.

Wales, who couldn’t stand Wardes' threatening attitude towards Louise any longer, stepped in.

“Viscount…, that’s enough. Behave like a gentlema…”

However, Wardes struck away Wales’ extended hand.

“Shut up!”

Wales stood still, surprised by Wardes words. Wardes clasped Louise’s hand with his and she felt as if it was a snake twining around it.

“Louise! You are necessary for me!”

“I don’t have any talent as a mage.”

“I told you many times already! You are just not aware of your power, Louise!”

Louise tried to shake off Wardes' hand, but the incredible strength with which he was holding on to her prevented it. Grimacing in pain, Louise spoke.

“I would rather die than marry you. I understand now, you never loved me. You only loved a magical power in me that you foolishly think I have. It is cruel, to marry someone just because of such a reason. It’s an insult!”

Louise raged. Wales put a hand on Wardes' shoulder, trying to pull him away, but Wardes pushed Wales instead, who fell on the ground.

Wales face turned red, and, after standing up again, he pulled out his cane.

“You, what impoliteness! It’s an insult! Viscount, move your hands away from la Vallière right now! Or else my magical blade will tear you up!”

Only then Wardes' hand finally let Louise go. A kind smile spread on his lips. However, the smile was forced and obviously fake.

“Even if I ask you this way you won’t do it? Louise. My Louise.”

Louise spoke, while trembling from anger.

“No, there is no doubt left that you are not the one whom I would ever marry.”

Wardes looked up at the sky.

“And I made such great efforts, to capture your feelings during this journey…”

Wardes spread his hands widely, while throwing his head backwards.

“Well, it can’t be helped. I guess I will have to give up on this goal.”

“Goal?”

Louise looked doubtful. What was he thinking about?

The corners of Wardes' lips went up, forming an ill looking smile.

“That’s right. There were three goals for me to achieve during this travel. Sadly, I achieved only two of them.”

“Achieve? Two? What are you talking about?” Louise asked, feeling the shivers of uneasiness travel down her spine. Her mind was working at full power, trying to figure out what was happening.

Wardes put out his right hand in front holding up three fingers, and bent his forefinger.

“First one was you, Louise. I had to get you. However, it seems that I won’t be able to accomplish that.”

“Obviously not!”

Wardes smiled, bending his middle finger.

“The second goal, Louise, is in your pocket - Henrietta's letter.”

Louise was startled.

“Wardes, you…”

“And, the third…”

After hearing Wardes saying “Henrietta’s letter”, Wales understood everything, pulled out his cane and started to chant a spell.

However, Wardes had already prepared two complete spells before.

Wardes aimed his wind cane that had started shining and with the tip pierced Wales chest.

“D-damn you…'Reconquista'…”

Blood suddenly gushed out of Wales mouth and Louise screamed.

Wardes muttered while piercing his shining cane deeper into Wales chest.

”The third, is your damned life, Wales.”

With that, Wales fell to the ground.

“A noble! Are you an Albionian noble as well!? Wardes!”

Louise shouted while trembling. Wardes was a traitor.

“That’s right. I am really a member of Albion's noble faction, ‘Reconquista’” Wardes replied in a cold, emotionless voice.

“Why! Why, would you, Tristain nobility, do such thing?”

“We are the first heralds of Halkeginia’s future – a union of nobles that has no national borders. We are borderless.”

Wardes raised the cane again.

“Halkeginia will be reunited into one by our hands, we will restore the Founder Brimir's ‘Sacred Land’ once again.”

“Before... you were not like this before. What changed you so much? Wardes...”

“Years, accidents and destiny. Though it changed me from whom you knew, it didn’t change my nature that you are talking about. And you are talking too much.”

Louise tried to duck when Wardes moved the cane, however his spell still hit her with ease, throwing her to the floor.

“Help...”

Louise’s face turned pale. She tried to stand up, but her legs stopped obeying her.

Wardes threw back his head.

“For this! For this you rejected my offer to rule the world together!”

He started to cast another wind spell. "Breaking Wind". And Louise was blown away like piece of paper.

“No…Help…”

“Even the smallest bird can’t hear you, it seems like you will have to bow your head in defeat, huh, Louise?”

She was thrown against the wall and left lying on the floor, groaning in pain. Tears started rolling down her face.

She still asked for the help of her familiar that wasn’t there.

“Help me…please…”

Louise repeated the words like chanting a spell. Enjoying himself, Wardes slowly started chanting.

“Lightning Cloud”

“It is regrettable… That your life will be taken by this hand…”

If even Saito’s arm was scorched by this blitz spell, there was no chance of survival if she was hit by it directly.

From shock her breath was rough and her whole body was in pain. Louise, scared like a child, cried –

“Saito! Help!”

At that moment, Wardes finished the spell and lowered his cane, aiming towards Louise and...

The wall of the chapel collapsed with a roaring sound, and a strong gust of wind blew in from the outside.

“Damn you…”

Wardes muttered.

After breaking the wall, Saito jumped in with Derflinger in his hand and stopped Wardes' cane.

"You…" Saito swung the sword sidewise. Wardes dodged it by jumping back.

Accidentally, Saito saw Louise out of the corner of his eye.

After screaming her last words, Louise had fainted and hadn't moved since.

With raging anger in his eyes, Saito glared at Wardes. Lust for killing was boiling in his body. Saito groaned while biting his lip hard.

“Unforgivable!”

“Why are you here, Gandálfr?” Wardes asked with a cruel smile on his lips.

Not answering, Saito angrily swung the sword. However, the sword only crushed the floor. Wardes flew up high into the air, successfully dodging the attack.

“That’s right, you must have sensed that your master was in danger.”

Wardes crossed his hands while floating next to the Founder Brimir's portrait. Looking confident and self-sure.

“You betrayed Louise!”

Saito shouted, while thrusting the sword forwards. Yet, Wardes flew up, dodged it and landed gracefully on the floor. He moved around like a feather.

“To accomplish a goal, you can’t be selective with the means.”

"Louise believed in you! You were her fiancé… She yearned for you when she was young…”

“Such selfish belief.”

Wardes dodged the sword while floating. Then he swung the cane and fired another spell. Though Saito tried to hold it down with the sword, the spell "Breaking Wind" blew him away.

Saito groaned in pain as he hit the wall. His injured left arm was aching and because of it, he could not move as freely as usual.

“That’s it? Gandálfr. Your movements are too slow. At least try and make it entertaining.”

A cruel smile floated on Wardes' lips.

At that moment, Derflinger shouted.

“I remembered!”

“What are you talking about, at time like this!?”

“Right…Gandálfr!”

“What!”

“No, from my older times, the hand that held me. Gandálfr. But I forgot. It was 600 years ago, old times.”

“Don’t talk nonsense!”

Wardes released "Breaking Wind" again. Saito tried to dodge it but was captured by the spell and blown away again.

”It’s so nostalgic. I could cry. Right, no, that’s what I was missing. My partner – that ‘Gandálfr’!”

"Cut it out!"

“I’m glad! Now no one can ignore me! I will show how cool I am!” Derflinger shouted as his blade started to shine.

Saito was taken aback for a moment and watched Derflinger in amazement.

“Derf? Yes?”

Wardes recited "Breaking Wind" again.

Raging wind flew out aiming at Saito as he put out the shining Derflinger in front of himself.

“It’s useless! A sword cannot stop it!” Wardes shouted.

Yet, the wind, instead of blowing Saito away, was sucked into Derflinger's blade.

And…

The light coming out of Derflinger intensified.

“Derf? You…”

“This is my true form! Partner! No, I forgot it! My tired body changed itself! Anyhow, it’s a pretty interesting story, partner!”

“Make it short!”

“Impatient. I forgot. But, don’t worry, partner. I suck in all magic around me! That’s me, Gandálfr’s left hand – Derflinger-sama!”

Wardes watched with interest at the sword that Saito was holding.

“Indeed… You are not an ordinary sword. I should have noticed that when you reduced my "Lightning Cloud”.

Still, Wardes did not loose his confidence.

He smiled thinly, when setting out the cane.

“Now, then, let's get serious, shall we? It is time to teach you why this magic is called the strongest.”

Though Saito jumped at him, Wardes dodged it like an acrobat and uttered the spell.

“Ubiquitous Dell Wind…”

When the spell was completed, Wardes' body suddenly doubled.

One… Two… Three… Four… Wardes' doubles, together with the real body, surrounded Saito.

“Doubles!”

“It is not only "Double". It’s "Ubiquitous Wind", uneven distribution… The wind is unevenly distributed. The place where it blows is not just a matter of appearance, but it has a substantial power too.”

One of Wardes' doubles suddenly pulled a white mask from the cloak and wore it.

Saito's body trembled. He was shivering with anger and fear. The masked man was Wardes! The man who was standing next to Fouquet… The one who hit Saito with a blitz was none other than Wardes!

“The masked man… You… Then it must be you who helped Fouquet to escape too. What a treacherous and useful spell. You can appear anywhere.”

“Indeed. More so, each one has the power of the original. I told you, right? ‘Wind’ is unevenly distributed!”

One of the Wardes jumped on Saito, while the other uttered the spell, making the cane shine.

"Air Needle", the same spell that pierced Wales' heart before.

“The cane is surrounded by a magical whirlpool, so the sword cannot suck it in!”

The cane was shaking as the whirlpool was rotating around it forming a blade, of which tip was aimed at Saito’s body during the attack.

Derflinger blocked it, but the impact of the blow still hit Saito’s injured hand and he fell down.

Wardes laughed.

“Not bad for a commoner. After all you are the legendary Gandálfr. However,

this is where it ends. You are no match for my "Ubiquitous Wind" spell!"

Gradually, Wardeses surrounded the fallen Saito.

“Hey, legendary sword! The one that ‘Gandálfr’ used! Derf!”

“That’s what I am. What is it?”

“If you are so legendary, then do something or else we will be killed.”

“Well, I am shining and sucking in enemies' magic, am I not?”

“No, not that, something more? Like some special attack? Like blowing the enemy away with a single hit…”

“What? I’m just a sword.”

One of the Wardes flew up and tried to hit Saito with his cane.

Saito jumped up, defending his body with his sword and dodging the attack.

“Useless! What kind of legend is this!”

“But not to this extent!”

The Wardeses kept on attacking violently, but because Saito's back was supported by the wall, only three of them could attack at the same time. Somehow he managed to block all of their attacks.

“At this rate I'll be defeated! And killed!”

“Good grief, my deepest sympathy!”

Meanwhile… 15 feet from the place where Saito was fighting, Louise woke up. When Louise saw Saito fighting hard, her face was momentarily blank with surprise, but then she grasped her wand.

“Run away while you can! Idiot!”

Saito shouted, but Louise didn’t stop. The spell was uttered and the wand was aimed. She chanted the ‘Fire Ball’ spell. The spell aimed at Wardes exploded

hitting the floor beneath him.

Boom! With that loud sound Wardes disappeared while Louise watched amazed.

“Eh? Disappeared? Because of my magic?”

The remaining Wardes tried to jump on Louise.

“Run away!” Saito shouted, but Louise stubbornly started to chant the same spell again. However, she was blown away by Wardes' cane this time.

Saito stared with astonishment.

He started shaking with anger. When Louise’s body hit the wall right before his eyes, a beast-like roar escaped his mouth.

“How dare you to do that to Louise…!”

Once Louise's body was blown off again, the remaining Wardes clones concentrated on Saito trying to press him further. However, Saito's movement gradually increased in speed.

All of the Wardeses' breathing became irregular and rough. Still, even then, their expression didn't change.

While blocking the sword, Wardes asked.

“Why did you come back to die? To risk your life for Louise who despises you? I can’t understand how a commoner’s mind works!”

Saito shouted while swinging the sword. “Then why did you bastard try to kill Louise!? You were her fiancée!”

“Hahaha, you are still in love with Louise? A servant's hopeless love for his master! That’s really funny! That arrogant Louise will never turn to you! Mere compassion mistaken for love! Fool!”

“So what if I fell in love!”

Saito shouted while biting down his lips.

“However…”

“However, what?”

“It is beating!”

“What?”

A puzzled expression floated on Wardes' face.

“Aah! When seeing that face, my heart is beating faster! This reason is good enough for me! Therefore I will defend Louise!”

Saito screamed.

The runes started shining.

Matching the light, Derflinger also shone brighter.

“Good! That’s good partner! Right! That’s the key! I remembered! I know the source of Gandálfr’s power! Good partner!”

Finally Saito’s sword cut down another Wardes.

“Wha?”

Wardes grimaced in an unbearable pain.

“Gandálfr's source of power is feelings! Anger! Sadness! Love! Pleasure! Anything is good! And now you seem to be really shaken, my Gandálfr!”

Saito rounded up the sword. Because of its terrible speed, Wardes was not able to react to the sword in time and disappeared.

“D-damn you…”

Only three remained now.

"Do not forget! You are fighting me! You can’t surpass my skills!"

Saito leaped high up into the air, holding his sword. Wardes also flew.

“The air is my element… Do not forget! Gandálfr!”

Each of the Wardes’ canes were aimed at Saito, but he brandished Derflinger like a pinwheel.

Derflinger shouted.

“That’s the way to fight, Gandálfr! Swing me in the rhythm of your heart!”

The next moment, all three Wardes were torn up in the blink of an eye.

Saito landed.

With ‘'Uneven Distribution’ defeated, the remaining real Wardes' body fell down

on the floor. <-The spell name changed...which to use? This one makes more sense. ~Dan->

His left arm, which had been cut off, landed there after a few seconds.

Saito also landed on the ground, but he stumbled and had to support himself with his knee. His tiredness had reached a critical limit.

Wardes stood up staggering and stared at Saito.

“Damn… This ‘Flash’ really defeated me…”

Saito tried to stand up and run up to him, but his body stopped obeying him.

“Ku…”

“Aah, partner. Don’t act foolishly now – Gandálfr cannot move after wasting his energy. That’s because this familiar was created to defend his master while the master chants the spell.”

Derflinger explained.

Wardes gripped his cane with his remaining right hand and floated upwards.

“Oh dear, it seems that I managed to accomplish only one of the goals. Anyways, now you are mine ‘Gandálfr’ – a large army will soon burst in. Hey! Can you hear the sound of horses' hooves and dragons' wings!?”

Indeed, one could hear the noise of cannons and sounds of fire magic explosions outside, as well as the roaring voices of nobles and soldiers mixed up in a battle.

“You and your foolish master will be turned to ashes! Gandálfr!”

Throwing those last parting words, Wardes disappeared through the hole in the wall.

Saito, who used Derflinger as a crutch for support, stumblingly walked up to Louise.

“Louise!”

Saito shook Louise trying to wake her up to no avail. Saito put his ear to Louise’s chest in panic.

Thump, thump, thump…

Hearing the faint heartbeat, he breathed out a sigh of relief. Louise was worn-out. Her mantle was torn, and her knees and cheek bruised.

And there must be more bruises under the clothes, too.

Louise’s hand was grasping her chest. Her breast pocket button came off, and one could see Henreitta’s letter peeping out from the inside. It seemed that, even unconscious, Louise was still protecting the letter.

Really, I am so glad you are alive. I came just in time. Saito thought.

“But partner… What do we do now? The Eagle already left the port…”

That’s right. To save Louise, Saito jumped down from the departing Eagle's deck.

“Eh?”

“Eh? Really. Can you hear the shouts outside? What do you think Wales' men would think seeing his body lying on the floor? They would think we are traitors for sure.”

Indeed, explosions and battle roars were getting closer and closer to the walls. It was only a matter of time before they would come bursting in here.

Saito quietly laid Louise on the chair.

And then stood up before her, standing guard.

“What are you doing?”

“Defending Louise.”

When Saito said this, Derflinger trembled while twitching.

“Ha. Other than that. I understand. Partner Gandálfr, it was nice to know you and

this noble girl, your master, partner.”

“Stop joking around.”

“Hm?”

“Louise and I, we will both survive.”

“Were you listening to the king’s speech? There are 50,000 enemies.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

Saito, with his last remaining strength, grasped the sword. Even 50,000, even 100,000 he felt like he could win. Today he could defeat any mage, even if he was extremely tired.

Derflinger’s shaking became louder and louder.

That’s right! That’s the way I like it. Who cares about 50,000. Let them come to us!”

And Saito, holding Derflinger, stared at the entrance of the chapel.

They waited, for sooner or later an enemy to come…

But then…

The ground, near the place where Louise was laid, rose up.

“What?”

Saito watched the ground.

“Is it an enemy? Digging under?”

He lowered the sword towards the hole, out of which a brown animal soon popped it’s head.

“Aaaaaaaan?”

And then that brown animal started groping Louise’s body that was lying

nearside.

“You… you are the huge mole Verdandi! Guiche’s familiar!”

Saito shouted, and soon enough from the same hole that Verdandi came out, Guiche's face appeared.

“Hey! Verdandi! You can dig a hole anywhere! Good boy! Gu….”

Guiche turned his soil smeared face from Saito and noticed Louise lying nearby, then said pretending not to know.

“Ha! You! You are here!”

“W-what are you doing here!?”

Saito shouted.

"Not that. After winning the battle against Fouquet the Crumbling Earth, and after a short break, we decided to follow you. It is our duty as princess Henrietta’s honor depends on it, right?”

“But this place is in the sky! How did you get here!?”

Then, near Guiche, Kirche’s face popped out.

“Tabitha's Sylphid.”

“Kirche!”

“We reached Albion successfully, but since it's a foreign country we didn’t know where to go. But then, Verdandi started digging a hole all of sudden, so we followed him.”

Meanwhile the huge mole was pressing his nose to the ‘Ruby of Water’ that was shining on Louise’s finger. Guiche nodded.

“Indeed. He followed the smell of the ruby, and started digging a tunnel to here. My cute Verdandi, because of his love for jewels he was able to follow from La Rochelle and dug a hole to get here.

Saito opened his mouth in amazement. He surely, never planned to be saved by a mole.

“Are you alright? I almost captured Fouquet again, but she made a narrow escape. That woman, though being a mage, surely does run away a lot. By the way, darling, what are you doing here?” Kirche asked while wiping off the dirt from her face with a handkerchief.

Saito laughed nerviously.

“Ha, ha, haha…”

“Dear? Is something wrong dear?”

“We’ll talk about it later! The enemy will burst in soon! Let’s run away!”

“Running away, and the mission? What about Viscount Wardes?”

“We have the letter! Wardes was a traitor! Return back now!”

“What? Well I do not understand it, but it seems everything ended already.” Kirche said in nonchalant voice.

With Louise in his arms, Saito slowly made his way through the hole. But then he remembered something. He left Louise in Guiche’s care and hurried back to Wales in the chapel.

However, Wales had already died.

Saito shut his eyes and silently said his prayers.

“Hey! What are you doing there! Come back quickly!” Guiche called Saito back.

Saito looked at Wales' body. He looked for some keepsake to give to Henrietta. He noticed a big ruby on his finger.

The ruby belonged to Albion’s royal family.

Saito removed it from the finger and put it in his pocket.

“Brave prince… You won’t be forgotten.” Saito muttered.

“I swear to you that I will also defend the things I believe in.”

Saito said bowing down, and ran back to the hole.

The same moment Saito dove in the hole, the noble soldiers and mages broke through the door and jumped into the chapel.

The tunnel Verdandi dug ran right under the Albion’s continent. So the moment Saito got out of the hole, there was nothing but clouds beneath, yet Sylphid successfully caught all four falling people and a mole.

The mole that the wind dragon caught with its mouth, let out a protesting cry.

“Please try to endure it, my cute Verdandi. Bear with it until we get off in Tristain again.”

With powerful wing strokes, the wind dragon broke through the surrounding clouds and changed direction to the Magical Academy.

Saito, with Louise in his arms, looked up at the continent of Albion.

Clouded and empty, blue inside, the Albion continent disappeared. Though it was a short stay there, Saito had various things to remember, as the white country faded from view.

Saito watched Louise lying in his arms. Her white cheeks were dirty with blood and soil, yet even in this state, one could see her aristocratic features. There were two stripes from her eyes down her cheeks left by her tears.

Saito wiped Louise’s face with his sleeve. He could not bear to see the face of his pretty master dirty.

Louise was still unconscious from the shock. Looking at Louise’s face was somehow painful to Saito. “Dear Louise. Louise. My Louise…”

Beat beat, his heart was beating loudly.

Now Saito looked only at Louise’s face pressed gently to his chest.

Meanwhile, Louise was absent-mindedly wandering in dream.

The dream in la Vallière’s place, in her hometown.

A pond in a forgotten courtyard…

There a small boat was floating… There, Louise was lying down. Whenever she faced difficulties, Louise always hid herself and slept there. This was her world that no one else intruded in, her secret place…

Louise’s heart was in pain.

But Wardes didn’t come here anymore. Gentle viscount Wardes, her childhood noble crush, her fiancé of marriage arranged by their fathers' mutual agreement…

Young Louise sobbed softly, there was no Wardes who would take her from her secret place anymore. He was a dirty betrayer that murdered the courageous prince, those kind hands belonged to a murderer…

Louise cried in her shallop.

But then, someone came.

“Is that you, Viscount?”

Louise asked in her dream. But she shook her head at once. No, the viscount didn’t come here anymore. Then, who?

It was Saito. The sword was hanging on his back, when he, without hesitation about getting wet, stepped into the pond and approached Louise’s shallop.

Louise's heart throbbed.

Saito picked up Louise out of the shallop and held her in his arms.

“Have you been crying?”

Saito asked. Louise nodded childishly in her dream.

“Stop crying. Louise. My Louise.”

Louise tried to get angry. *This familiar, how dare he call me ‘My Louise’*. But when she opened her mouth to scold him, her lips were closed again with a kiss. Though she wriggled in rage at first, the strength soon left her body.

Louise woke up on a wind dragon's back, in Saito’s arms.

She became aware that she was held in Saito’s arms. They were sitting near the wind-dragon’s tail, and Saito sat there embracing her. She stared at his face from the side as it seemed like he didn’t notice that she was awake.

Kirche, Tabitha, Guiche – all three of them, were sitting on the front of the wind dragon’s back.

The wind was blowing against her cheeks.

“Aah, this isn’t a dream."

Then…

"I survived.”

Louise’s mind was filled with feverish thoughts.

I was almost killed by that traitor Wardes, but then Saito jumped in. Then I fainted. Then I woke up again and chanted some magic. After that, though, I lost consciousness… maybe Saito won again.

But only we survived, maybe the royal army was still defeated.

Wales died as well.

The happiness of surviving mixed with sadness almost made Louise cry. However, not wanting to cry in front of Saito, she closed her eyes.

She was also ashamed to say thank you. Though she could not understand why,

she was comfortable with Kirche, Tabitha, Guiche – with all of them. But thanking Saito before everyone felt really embarrassing. Therefore, Louise decided to pretend she was sleeping.

Nevertheless, Louise still secretly watched him from the corner of her half-closed eyes.

Saito looked into her eyes. He looked directly at her.

Those eyes made Louise recall her last dream.

The air dragon increased speed.

Strong wind hit her cheeks.

But that wind felt pleasant.

That wind and Saito's burning gaze, aah, Louise couldn't hide her feelings.

Her mind was in turmoil…

Traitor Wardes.

The crown prince's death…

The noble union's 'Reconquista' victory…

Reporting to the Princess…

For various reasons, and while Louise felt sorry for them all, right now all Louise's thoughts were blown away by the wind.

After nearly escaping death, she wanted to savour the feeling of life for a while.

Like that, savouring the feeling of life without limits, while pretending to sleep…

Saito's face moved closer.

Her heart skipped a beat.

Saito's lips overlapped Louise’s.

Louise instinctively lifted her hand to push him away…but returned it back to her chest instead.

Strong wind hit Louise's cheeks, as Sylphid flew through the sky.

Something warm filled her heart, a heart that was wounded by sad events was healed.

Some time ago she was struggling violently against the feeling in her dream.

But at least for now…

The pleasant wind blew from a different world…

Resting her cheek against his chest, she silently fell asleep.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Bishōjo , Bishōjo? ; ; means "beautiful young girl" in Japanese.
2. ↑ "Itadakimasu" is a Japanese Honorific used when one is about eat. In this case, it means that Saito beginning to 'devour' Louise ^^
3. ↑ "Genoa" I'm not sure about the exact translation so if anyone has it please replace it for me. Thanks!
4. ↑ Old medieval German duchy. Here's the Wiki page [1]
5. ↑ whore was used here.
   Kirche was very insulting to Louise. And, because of her character, she used a rather formal/literature-sounding word of "whore". Or because the author intentionally used a formal one because he/she didn't want ZnT to be vulgar/vile/dirty. (Thanks akiha)
6. ↑ Griffin Knights - One of the few Knight Orders formed to protect the royal Family.
7. ↑ meaning "Beautiful Youth" in Japanese. Mostly used for describing males.
8. ↑ All nobles wear cloaks with an insignia in front.
9. ↑ A grebe is a species of freshwater diving bird. They dive their beaks into the water to snatch fish as prey.